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PEN AND INK

Books by Brander Matthews:

ESSAYS AND CRITICISMS

French Dramatists of the 19th Century

Pen and Ink, Essays on subjects of more or less importance

Aspects of Fiction, and other Essays

The Historical Novel, and other Essays

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The Development of the Drama *(in preparation)*

PEN AND INK

PAPERS ON SUBJECTS OF MORE OR LESS IMPORTANCE

BY

BRANDER MATTHEWS

THIRD EDITION
REVISED AND ENLARGED

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By Brander Matthews.

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PEN AND INK.

Ye wanderers that were my sires,
Who read men's fortunes in the hand,
Who voyaged with your smithy fires
From waste to waste across the land,
Why did you leave for garth and town
Your life by heath and river's brink?
Why lay your Gipsy freedom down
And doom your child to Pen and Ink?

You wearied of the wild-wood meal
That crowned, or failed to crown, the day,
Too honest or too tame to steal,
You broke into the beaten way:
Plied loom or awl like other men
And learned to love the guinea's chink.
Oh, recreant sires, who doomed me then
To earn so few—with Pen and Ink!

Where it hath fallen the tree must lie.
'Tis over-late for ME *to roam.*
Yet the caged bird who hears the cry
Of his wild fellows fleeting home

May feel no sharper pang than mine,
Who seem to hear, whene'er I think,
Spate in the stream and wind in pine
Call me to quit dull Pen and Ink.

For then the Spirit wandering,
That sleeps within the blood, awakes;
For then the summer and the spring
I fain would meet by streams and lakes.
But ah, my birthright long is sold,
But custom chains me, link on link,
And I must get me, as of old,
Back to my tools, to Pen and Ink.

A. LANG.

CONTENTS.

		PAGE
	"Pen and Ink," by A. Lang . . .	xiii
I	*On the Antiquity of Jests*	1
II	*The Ethics of Plagiarism*	23
III	*The True Theory of the Preface* . . .	53
IV	*The Philosophy of the Short-story* . .	73
V	*A Note on the Essay*	107
VI	*Two Latter-day Lyrists*	119
	I *Frederick Locker*	
	II *Austin Dobson*	
VII	*The Songs of the Civil War*	167
VIII	*On the French spoken by those who do not speak French*	197
IX	*The Dramatization of Novels* . . .	219
X	*The Whole Duty of Critics*	253
	"An Epistle to the Author," by H. C. Bunner	275

I

ON THE ANTIQUITY OF JESTS

ON THE ANTIQUITY OF JESTS.

HERE are not a few very interesting and instructive books waiting to be written. Two goodly tomes there are, for example, which I am anxious to own,—the 'Anecdote History of Private Theatricals,' and 'A Historical Treatise on Scene-Painting and Stage-Mechanism.' Unfortunately nobody has yet thought it worth his while to write either of them, though it would be difficult to find anywhere two books about the stage more entertaining, more useful, and easier to put together. But a book which I would receive with more welcome and review more willingly even than these is the 'Authentic Jest-Book, chronologically arranged, with exact references to the original authorities and a collation of the parallel passages in other authors.' It may be thought that of jest-books we have a many, and that, at best, they are but dreary reading. And so it is. But the 'Authentic Jest-Book' is wholly unlike any other collection of jokes and gibes and

repartees and witticisms; it is unlike them all, and better than any of them. In the ordinary gathering of merry jests, whether it be the collection of Hierocles, the Greek, or of Abou-na-wass, the Persian, whether it be the 'Moyen de Parvenir,' the compilation of some contemporary of Rabelais, or the 'Gesta Romanorum' growing together in monkish hands, whether it be the humorous anthology of the worthy Poggio or that credited to the unworthy Joseph Miller, in any and all of the recognized receptacles of the waifs and strays of wit and humor, there is one marked, permanent, and fatal defect: the most of the jokes are unidentified and unauthenticated; they are set down as they were familiar in men's mouths at the time when Poggio and Hierocles and the double of Joseph Miller and their fellows went about taking notes. In other words, no effort has been made hitherto to show the genesis of jests, and to declare with precision and with authority just when a given joke was first made and just what transformations and adventures it has since undergone.

The jest-book I want is one giving chapter and verse for every laugh in it. In 'L'Esprit dans l'Histoire' and in 'L'Esprit des Autres,' Edouard Fournier made an attempt along the right path;

and he was followed aptly and promptly by Mr. Hayward in the essay on the 'Pearls and Mock-Pearls of History.' Fournier and Hayward succeeded in showing that many an accepted witticism is a very Proteus, reappearing again and again with a change of face. Other jokes are, like Cagliostro, turning up once in a century quite as young as ever. There is, for instance, a story told by Lord Stair, called the politest man in France —because he obeyed the king's request and jumped into the royal carriage before his majesty. Lord Stair bore a singular resemblance to Louis XIV., who was moved to ask him if Lord Stair's mother had ever been to Paris; to which Lord Stair replied, "No, your majesty, but my father has." The same story is told of Henri IV. and a certain gentleman of Gascony. It can be found in Macrobius, where it is related of a general who came from Spain to the court of the Cæsars. Now, in the 'Authentic Jest-Book,' this anecdote would reappear in an English translation of the exact words of Macrobius, with a note setting forth the revival of the retort under Henri IV. and Louis XIV.: no doubt it has been told of many another monarch who was the father of his people in the fashion of the *roi vert-galant*. Moore, as in duty bound, sets down Sheridan's light-hearted

jest while he watched the burning of Drury Lane Theatre from the coffee-house where he was sipping a glass of sherry—"Surely a man may take a glass of wine at his own fireside!" This is a saying quite worthy of Sheridan, and one which he was quite capable of making; but Moore, with a wise scepticism, suggested that it "may have been, for aught I know, like the Wandering Jew, a regular attendant upon all fires since the time of Hierocles."

There is, indeed, a metempsychosis of professional jokes. A merry jest about a preacher or a player or a physician is reincarnated in every generation. It is like royalty, it never dies—*Le roi est mort! Vive le roi!* Garrick's death eclipses the gayety of nations, but the stroke of humor which told for or against Garrick soon tells for or against Grimaldi. By a sort of apostolic succession, the anecdotes about a popular clergyman pass to the clergyman who succeeds him in popularity. Two of these perennial tales—one about a player, and the other about a preacher—have had an exceptionally strong hold on life. In the first a severe hypochondriac consults a physician, who advises recreation: "You should see Liston!" "I am Liston!" answers the severe hypochondriac. This is told of Grimaldi and of many another comic

performer before and since his time. The earliest instance I have been able to find is in connection with Dominique, the famous arlequin of the Comédie-Italienne under Louis XIV. Arlequin Dominique was ready of speech, as an anecdote proves which has yet only one hero: the monarch was fond of the mimic, and seeing him thirsty one day, bade a servant give him a goblet filled to the brim. Now the goblet was of gold, so Arlequin slyly queried, "And the wine, too, your majesty?" But this is a digression.

The second story relates to a certain popular preacher, who on a sultry summer morning arose in his pulpit and wiped his forehead and said, "It is damned hot!" And when the congregation were properly shocked into wakefulness, he said, "Such were the words which met my ears this morning as I entered this house of worship!" and then he proceeded to preach a vigorous sermon against the sin of profanity. In the article which an important London weekly devoted to the celebration of Mr. Spurgeon's fifty years of ministry, this saying and this sermon were placed in the mouth of Mr. Spurgeon. In the United States Mr. Henry Ward Beecher was generally supposed to have said them—there are not wanting those who declare that they heard him—in spite of the

eloquent protests and denial of his sister, Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe. But Rowland Hill preceded both Mr. Beecher and Mr. Spurgeon as the protagonist of this little sacred play; and Robert Hall had appeared in the part before Rowland Hill. Who the real originator may be will not be known with certainty until the 'Authentic Jest-Book' appears.

One class of anecdote should be excluded scrupulously from my model collection. It is the anecdote unvouched for by a recognizable proper name as one of the *dramatis personæ*. It is the anecdote which relates us the *faits et gestes* of "a certain Oxford scholar" or "a well-known wit" or "a foolish fellow." These anonymous tales are as unworthy of credence as an anonymous letter. A merry jest ought always to be accompanied by the name of the hero, necessarily for publication and as a guarantee of good faith. When the tale is tagged to a man whose name we know, investigation is possible and we may get at the truth. But these nameless stories are of no country and of no century—rather are they of all nations and of all times. It has been well said that Irish bulls were calves in Greece. There is a familiar Irish anecdote, not to be told here, though innocent enough, which turns on the continuance of the

pattering of the rain-drops. This was confided to me a few years ago in America as the latest importation from the Emerald Isle. A year later, I read it in one of the ten volumes of the 'Historiettes' of Tallemant des Réaux, who flourished in the middle of the seventeenth century. The next summer, I happened to choose for my light reading 'Le Moyen de Parvenir,' attributed by most to Beroalde de Varville, although it may possibly be, in part at least, the work of Rabelais; and in this collection, put together in the sixteenth century, again I found my Irish story,—Gascon, this time, I think; certainly no longer Hibernian. It is characteristic of the transmigration of tales, that the story which we find first in the 'Moyen de Parvenir,' avowedly a work of fiction, reappears a hundred years later in the Memoirs of Tallemant as a fact. It is a wise anecdote that knows its own father.

To another French collection, the 'Contes du Sieur Galliard,' by Tabourot des Accords, Mr. Richard Grant White has traced one of the most amusing stanzas of 'Yankee Doodle'—

> Yankee Doodle came to town
> And wore his striped trowsis;
> Said he couldn't see the town,
> There were so many houses.

The French ancestor is: "Chascun me disoit que je verrois une si grande et belle ville; mais on se mocquoit de moi; car on ne le peut voir à cause de la multitude des maisons qui empêchent la veüe." And I think there is an even older English saying to the effect that one could not see the forest for the trees.

There is no need here to enter on the vexed question of plagiarism, though it is very tempting at all times. One chapter of the 'History of Plagiarism'—another of the interesting books waiting to be written—must contain many facts of interest tending to show the survival of humor. Almost the oldest literary monument in the history of the French comedy is the 'Farce de Maître Pierre Pathelin'; it is as primitive and as positive in its humor as a play can be. An adaptation of it under the name of 'L'Avocat Pathelin' was made by Brueys and Palaprat, in accordance with the canons of French dramatic art which obtained in the eighteenth century. From 'L'Avocat Pathelin' was taken an English farce, the 'Village Lawyer,' brought out at Drury Lane under the management of David Garrick. The 'Village Lawyer' kept the stage for nearly a century, and the last time it was acted in New-York Mr. Joseph Jefferson took the chief part. A perversion of the

'Village Lawyer,' under the title of the 'Great Sheep Case,' has been made for the use of the ruder and more boisterous actors who perform in the entertainments known, for some inscrutable reason, as Variety Shows. Thus it happens that one of the earliest comic plays of France still keeps the stage in America—as strong an instance of the tenacity of humor as one could wish.

When a story is authenticated by a proper name we are inclined to treat it with more respect than when it is a mere bastard with no right to a patronymic. There has recently been put into circulation in America an anecdote sharpened to the same point as an anecdote recorded in the histrionic biographies of the last century; but the proper names which appear in both versions lead one to believe that there has been no wilful infringement of copyright. Foote was forever girding at Garrick's parsimony—very unjustly, for Garrick was careful of the pence only that he might have pounds to lend and to give. Garrick dropped a guinea once and sought it in vain, until he gave up the search, saying petulantly, "I believe it has gone to the devil!" Whereupon Foote remarked that Davy could make a guinea go farther than any one else. This is the tale as told in the last century in the Old World. Here is the

tale as told in the New World in this century. When Mr. William M. Evarts was Secretary of State he went with a party to see the Natural Bridge in Virginia, not very far from the capital. Somebody repeated the tradition that George Washington once threw a silver dollar over the bridge—a very remarkable feat of strength and skill. "In those days," was the comment of Mr. Evarts, "in those days a dollar went so much farther than it does now!" Although the point is the same on which the two tales turn, they impress one as of quite independent invention; we may doubt whether Mr. Evarts, who has a merry wit of his own, ever heard of Foote's gibe.

When, however, the story is not vouched for by a proper name, the probability is that the successive reappearances of an anecdote are due to a survival in oral tradition. There is in America a familiar tale, summed up in the phrase "Let the other man walk!" It relates that a traveller in a hotel was kept awake long past midnight by a steady tramp, tramp, tramp, on the floor over him. At last he went upstairs and asked what the matter might be. The occupant of the upper room said that he owed money to another man for which he had given a note, and the note came due on the morrow and he could not meet it.

"Are you certain that you cannot pay your debt?" asked the visitor. "Alas, I cannot," replied the debtor. "Then," said the visitor, "if it cannot be helped, lie down and go to sleep—and let the other man walk!" Now this is a mere Americanization of a story of Poggio's of an inhabitant of Perugia, who walked in melancholy because he could not pay his debts. "Vah, stulte," was the advice given him, "leave anxiety to your creditors!"

Another well-worn American anecdote describes the result of owning both a parrot and a monkey. When the owner of the bird and the beast comes home one day, he finds the monkey decked with red and green feathers, but he does not find the parrot for a long while. At last, the bird appears from an obscure corner plucked bare save a single tail-feather; he hops upon his perch with such dignity as he can muster and says, with infinite pathos, "Oh, we have had a hell of a time!" At first nothing could seem more American than this, but there is a story essentially the same in Walpole's Letters. Yet another parrot story popular in New-York, where a well-known wit happens to be a notorious stutterer, is as little American as this of Walpole's. The stutterer is supposed to ask the man who offers the parrot for

sale if it c-c-c-can t-t-t-talk. "If it could not talk better than you I'd wring its neck," is the vender's indignant answer. I found this only the other day in Buckland's 'Curiosities of Natural History,' first published nearly a quarter of a century ago; and since this paper was first published a contributor to the *Dramatic Review* has traced it back to Henry Philips's 'Recollections.'

The two phrases, "let the other man walk" and "we have had a hell of a time," have passed into proverbs in America. The anecdotes in which they are enshrined happened to tickle the fancy of the American people most prodigiously. There is in them, as they are now told in the United States, a certain dryness and directness and subtlety and extravagance—four qualities characteristic of much of the American humor which is one of the most abundant of our exports. In nothing is the note of nationality more distinct than in jokes. The delicate indelicacies of M. Grévin are hardly more un-English than the extravagant vagaries of the wild humorists of the boundless prairies of the West. In Hebrew I am informed and believe the pun is a legitimate figure of lofty rhetoric, and in England I have observed it is the staple of comic effort; in America most of us are intolerant of the machine-made pun. To be acceptable to

the American mind the pun must have an element of unexpected depravity—like Dr. Holmes's immortal play on a word when he explains to us that an onion is like an organ because it smell odious. As a rule, however, the native American humorist eschews all mere juggling with double meanings. He strives to attain an imaginative extravagance, recalling rather Rabelais than the more decorous contributors to the collection of *Mr. Punch*. Artemus Ward suggests quietly that it would have been money in Jeff. Davis's pocket if he had never been born. Mark Twain in an answer to a correspondent recommends fish as a brain-food, and after considering the contributions proffered by the correspondent, indicates as his proper diet two whales—not necessarily large whales, just ordinary ones. But one of the best characters Mark Twain ever sketched from life, Colonel Mulberry Sellers, is almost exactly like a character in Ben Jonson's 'The Devil is an Ass.' And Charles Lamb and Sydney Smith would have felt a thrill of delight at meeting the man who wanted to run up to Rome from Civita Vecchia that he might have 'twenty minutes in the Eternal City.' Indeed, if Mark Twain had only been a parson, he might have written singularly like unto the merry curate who once lived five miles from a lemon. Perhaps the

strict theological training would have checked that tendency to apparent irreverence which leads Americans to speak disrespectfully of the equator. I think this irreverence is more apparent than actual. Americans are brought up on the Bible, and they use the familiar phrases of the authorized version without intent of irreverence. I have seen an Englishman shocked at passages in the 'Biglow Papers' which an American accepted without hesitation or thought of evil.

Perhaps the most marked of the four chief characteristics of contemporary American humor — dryness, directness, subtlety, and extravagance — is a compound of the two latter into something very closely resembling imagination. An American reviewer of Mr. John Ashton's 'Humor, Wit, and Satire of the Seventeenth Century' — a most useful work, by the way, to whosoever shall undertake hereafter the editing of the 'Authentic Jest-Book' — drew attention to the unlikeness of the mere telling of an incident — possibly comic enough in its happening, but vapid and mirthless beyond measure when it is set down in cold print — the unlikeness of this sort of comic tale to the more imaginative anecdotes now in favor in American newspapers. The reviewer copied from Mr. Ashton's book a comic tale taken from the 'Sack-

ful of Newes,' published in 1673, and set over against it a little bit of the paragraphic humor which floats hither and thither on the shifting waves of American journalism. Here is the merry jest of two centuries ago:

"A certain butcher was flaying a calf at night, and had stuck a lighted candle upon his head, because he would be the quicker about his business, and when he had done he thought to take the same candle to light him to bed; but he had forgot where he had set it, and sought about the house for it, and all the while it stuck in his cap upon his head and lighted him in seeking it. At the last one of his fellows came and asked him what he sought for. 'Marry (quoth he), I look for the candle which I did flay the calf withal.' 'Why, thou fool,' qd. he, 'thou has a candle in thy cap.' And then he felt towards his cap, and took away the candle burning, whereat there was great laughing and he mocked for his labor, as he was well worthy."

And here is the journalistic joke of our own day:

"A colored individual who went down on the slippery flags at the corner of Woodward Avenue and Congress Street, scrambled up and backed out into the street, and took a long look towards the roof of the nearest building.

'You fell from that third-story window!' remarked a pedestrian who had witnessed the tumble.

'Boss, I believes yer!' was the prompt reply; 'but what puzzles me am de queshun of how I got up dar, an' why I was leanin' outer de winder!'"

Of course neither of these tales would find a place in the 'Authentic Jest-Book,' for the first is a flat telling of a flat fact and the second is an obvious invention of the enemy. But they are valuable as indications of the steady and increasing evolution of humor. Even if the merry jest about the butcher and his candle had been ennobled by a great name, it would have gone to the wall as one of the weakest jokes known to the student of the history of humor. The doctrine of the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence is as applicable to jests as it is to other entities. A given joke develops best in a given environment—a pun, for example, has more chance of life in England, a bit of imaginative extravagance in America, and a gibe at matrimonial infelicity or infidelity in France. It would be a great step gained if we could get at the primordial germs of wit or discover the protoplasm of humor.

Certain jests, like certain myths, exist in variants

in all parts of the world. Comparative mythologists are diligently collecting the scattered folk-lore of all races; why should they not also be gathering together the primitive folk-humor? Cannot some comparative philologist reconstruct for us the original jest-book of the Aryan people? It would be very interesting to know the exact stock of jokes our forefathers took with them in their migrations from the mighty East. It would be most instructive to be informed just how far they had got in the theory and practice of humor. It would be a pure joy to discover precisely what might be the original fund of root-jests laughed at by Teuton and Latin and Hindoo before these races were differentiated one from another by time and travel and climate. I wonder whether the pastoral Aryan knew and loved an early form of Lamb's favorite comic tale, the one in which a mad wag asks the rustic whether that is his own hare or a wig? And what did the dark-haired Iberian laugh at before the tall blonde Aryan drove him into the corners of Europe? It was probably some practical joke or other, in which a bone knife or a flint arrow-head played the chief part. The records of the Semitic race are familiar to us, but we know nothing or next to nothing about the primitive humor of the alleged Turanians.

When this good work is well in hand, and when the collector of comic orts and ends is prepared to make his report, there might be held an International Exhibition of Jokes, which would be quite as useful and quite as moral as some of the International Exhibitions we have had of late years. I think I should spend most of my time in the Retrospective Section studying the antique jests. "Old as a circus joke" might be a proverb, and the Christmas pantomime and the Christy Minstrel can supply jokes both practical and otherwise, quite as fatigued and as hoary with age as those of the circus. Among its many advantages this International Exhibition of Jokes would have one of great importance—it would forever dispel the belief in the saying of one of old that there were only thirty-eight good stories in existence, and that thirty-seven of these could not be told before ladies. There might have been some foundation for this saying in the days when the ladies had to leave the table after dinner because the conversation of the gentlemen then became unfit for their ears. While a good joke should be like a pin, in that it should come to a head soon and be able to stand on its point, yet only too many sorry jests are rather to be defined as unlike a mathematical line, in that they have breadth as well as length.

It is perhaps owing to the existence of stories of this sort that woman has lost the faculty of story-telling. Of course, I do not mean that the fair sex are not felicitous at fiction; the Scheherazades of the serials would confute me at once. I mean that women do not amuse each other by the exchange of anecdote as men are wont to do. They do not retail the latest good thing. They chat, gossip, giggle, converse, talk, and amuse themselves easily together, but they do not swop stories in man-fashion. Where man is objective, woman is subjective. She is satisfied with her own wit, without need of colporting the humor of a stranger. Woman's wit has sex. It is wholly different from man's wit. From Beatrice (though she was said to take hers from the 'C. Merry Tales') to Mrs. Poyser (who gave us that marvellous definition of a conceited man as one who was like the cock that thought the sun rose to hear him crow), the bright women of fiction have been witty rather than humorous. It may be that the distinction between wit and humor is one of sex after all. I have a friend — he is an editor — who declares that the difference between wit and humor, and again between talent and genius, is only the difference between the raspberry and the strawberry. Doubtless God might have made a better berry than the strawberry, and doubtless God

might have given man a better gift than humor—but he never did. Woman has not the full gift; she has wit and some humor, it is true, but she has only a slighter sense of humor, whence comes much marital unhappiness. As George Eliot tells us, "a difference of taste in jests is a great strain of the affections."

It is said that the rustic, both the male and the female of that peculiar species, has a positive hostility to a new joke. I do not believe this. Of a certainty it is not true of the American of New England, who is as humorous in his speech as he is shrewd in his business dealings, and the more humor he has the less sharp he is in trade and the less severe in his views as to the necessity of work. We may cite in proof of this Mrs. Stowe's delightful portrait of that village ne'er-do-well, Sam Lawson. And I doubt if it is true of the English rustic as he really is, for we know it is not true of him as he appears in the pages of George Eliot and of Mr. Thomas Hardy. There he has a mother-wit of his own, and although fond of the old joke, the meaning of which has been fully fathomed, he is not intolerant of a new quip or a fresh gibe. What he cannot abide is a variation in the accepted form of an accepted anecdote. This he will none of—as a child resolutely rejects the slightest deviation

from the canonical version of the fairy-tale with which she is fondly familiar. The rustic and the child are loyal to old friends, whether it be The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods, or Brer Rabbit and the Tar-Baby, or Old Grouse in the Gunroom, at which honest Diggory had laughed these twenty years, and which now, alas! is utterly lost to the knowledge of man, even Goldsmith's latest and most learned biographer confessing perforce that he has been wholly unable to recover it from out the darkness of the past.

(1885)

II

THE ETHICS OF PLAGIARISM

THE ETHICS OF PLAGIARISM.

HEN Sir Walter Scott came to consider 'Gil Blas,' and the alleged plagiarisms it contains from the Spanish story-tellers, he spoke with the frankness and sturdy sense which were two of his chief characteristics. "Le Sage's claim to originality in this delightful work," he wrote, "has been idly, I had almost said ungratefully, contested by those critics who conceive they detect a plagiarist wherever they see a resemblance in the general subject of the work to one which has been before treated by an inferior artist. It is a favorite theme of laborious dulness to trace out such coincidences; because they appear to reduce genius of the higher order to the usual standard of humanity, and, of course, to bring the author nearer a level with his critics. It is not the mere outline of a story, not even the adopting some details of a former author, which constitutes the

literary crime of plagiarism. The proprietor of the pit from whence Chantrey takes his clay might as well pretend to a right in the figure into which it is moulded under his plastic fingers; and the question is in both cases the same — not so much from whom the original substance came, as to whom it owes that which constitutes its real merit and excellence."

In his delightful paper on Gray, Mr. Lowell declares that "we do not ask where people got their hints, but what they made out of them." Mr. Lowell, I doubt me, is speaking for himself alone, and for the few others who attempt the higher criticism with adequate insight, breadth, and equipment. Only too many of the minor critics have no time to ask what an author has done, they are so busy in asking where he may have got his hints. Thus it is that the air is full of accusations of plagiary, and the bringing of these accusations is a disease which bids fair to become epidemic in literary journalism. Perhaps this is a sign, or at least a symptom, of the intellectual decadence of our race which these same critics sometimes venture to announce. In the full flood of a creative period people cannot pause to consider petty charges of plagiarism. Greene's violent outbreak against the only Shakescene of them all, who had

decked himself out in their feathers, seems to have excited little or no attention. Nowadays, a pamphlet like Greene's last dying speech and confession would serve as a text for many a leading article and for many a magazine essay.

"There is, I fear," wrote Lord Tennyson to Mr. Dawson, a year or two ago, "a prosaic set growing up among us, editors of booklets, bookworms, index-hunters, or men of great memories and no imagination who impute themselves to the poet, and so believe that he, too, has no imagination, but is forever poking his nose between the pages of some old volumes in order to see what he can appropriate." A pleasant coincidence of thought is to be noted between these words of Lord Tennyson and the remarks of Sir Walter Scott about 'Gil Blas.' Both poets think ill of the laborious dulness of the literary detective, and suggest that he is actuated by malice in judging others by himself. The police detective is akin to the spy, and although his calling is often useful, and perhaps even necessary, we are not wont to choose him as our bosom friend; the amateur literary detective is an almost useless person, who does for pleasure the dirty work by which the real detective gets his bread.

The great feat of the amateur literary detective is to run up parallel columns, and this he can ac-

complish with the agility of an acrobat. When first invented, the setting of parallel passages side by side was a most ingenious device, deadly to an impostor or to a thief caught in the very act of literary larceny. But these parallel passages must be prepared with exceeding care, and with the utmost certainty. Unless the matter on the one side exactly balance the matter on the other side, like the packs on a donkey's back, the burden is likely to fall about the donkey's feet, and he may chance to break his neck. Parallel columns should be most sparingly used, and only in cases of absolute necessity. As they are employed now only too often, they are quite inconclusive; and it has been neatly remarked that they are perhaps like parallel lines, in that they would never meet, however far produced. Nothing can be more puerile, childish, infantine even, than the eagerness with which the amateur literary detective shows, to his own complete satisfaction, that two of the most original authors who ever wrote — Shakspere and Molière — were barefaced borrowers and convicted plagiarists. There are not a few other of his deeds almost as silly as this. I wonder that the secure ass (the phrase is from the 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' and not mine, I regret to say) who thinks that Sheridan took his 'Rivals'

from Smollett's 'Humphrey Clinker' and his 'School for Scandal' from his mother's 'Memoirs of Miss Sydney Biddulph'—the absurd persons who have gravely doubted whether Mr. Stevenson did not find the suggestion of his 'Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' in Hawthorne's 'Dr. Grimshawe's Secret'—and the malicious folk who have been accusing Mr. Haggard with filching the false teeth and lifting the white calves of other African explorers who were not in search of King Solomon's mines—I wonder that the amateur literary detective of this sort has never seen what a strong case can be made out against M. Alphonse Daudet (a notorious imitator of Dickens, it may be remembered) for having extracted the 'Rois en Exile' from the third paragraph of the first chapter of the 'History of Henry Esmond,' and against Mr. Thackeray for having derived this passage from his recollections of a scene in Voltaire's 'Candide.'

It was the original owner of King Solomon's mines who asserted that there was nothing new under the sun; and after the lapse of hundreds of years one may suggest that a ready acceptance of the charge of plagiarism is a sign of low culture, and that a frequent bringing of the accusation is a sign of defective education and deficient intelligence. Almost the first discovery of a student of

letters is that the history of literature is little more than a list of curious coincidences. The folk-tales which lie at the foundation of all fiction are almost the same the wide world over, from the Eskimo at the top of North America to the Zulu at the tip of South Africa; they can hardly have had a common source, and there are few traces of conscious borrowing or of unconscious lending.

These folk-tales are as ancient as they are widespread, and when Uncle Remus relates the adventures of Brer Rabbit and Brer Terrapin, he is repeating a variant of adventures which were told in Greece before Homer sang. And as these folk-tales were made each by itself and yet alike, in many places and at all ages of the world, so in more formal literature do we find stories strangely similar one to another, and yet independently invented. People have always been ready, like the Athenians of old, to hear or to tell some new thing—and the new thing, when dissected, is soon seen to be an old thing. The tales have all been told. If we were to take from the goodman La Fontaine the *contes* which had had another owner before he found them by the highway, he would be left like a Manx cat or the flock of Little Bo-Peep. There are some situations, primitive and powerful, which recur in all literatures with

the inevitable certainty of the fate which dominates them. What is the 'Hamlet' of Shakspere, in its essence, but the 'Orestes' trilogy of Æschylus? And what man shall be bold enough to claim for himself or for another the first use of the Hidden Will, of the Infants-changed-at-Nurse, or of the Stern-Parent-who-cuts-off-his-Son-with-a-Shilling?

After recording a slight similarity of subject and of point of view between the 'Famille Benoiton' of M. Victorien Sardou and the 'Young Mrs. Winthrop' of Mr. Bronson Howard, Mr. William Archer remarks pertinently that "in the domain of the drama there is no such thing as private property in the actual soil; all that the playwright can demand is security for his improvements," and he adds that "were tenure in fee-simple permissible, the whole cultivable area would long ago have been occupied by a syndicate of pestilent land-grabbers, named Menander, Calderon, Shakspere & Co., and the dramatist of to-day would have had no resource save emigration to some other planet." I have read that Schiller in the last century, and Scribe in this, made out a list of all the possible dramatic situations, and that both lists were surprisingly brief. M. Zola's admirable definition of art is "Nature seen through a temperament"; and the most a man may bring nowadays

is his temperament, his personal equation, his own pair of spectacles, through which he may study the passing show in his own way.

As it is with situations which are the broad effects of the drama or the novel or the poem, so it is with the descriptions and the dialogue which make the smaller effects. Words are more abundant than situations, but they are wearing out with hard usage. Language is finite, and its combinations are not countless. "It is scarcely possible for any one to say or write anything in this late time of the world to which, in the rest of the literature of the world, a parallel could not be found somewhere," so Lord Tennyson declared in the letter from which I have already quoted. "Are not human eyes all over the world looking at the same objects, and must there not consequently be coincidences of thought and impressions and expressions?" The laureate was not at all surprised to be told that there were two lines in a certain Chinese classic (of which he had never heard) exactly like two of his. Once I found an exceedingly close translation of one of Lord Tennyson's lines in a French comedy in verse, and when I asked the dramatist about it, I soon saw that he did not know anything about the English poem,—or even about the English poet.

In cases like these there is no need to dispute the good faith of the author who may chance to be later in point of time. "When a person of fair character for literary honesty uses an image such as another has employed before him, the presumption is that he has struck upon it independently, or unconsciously recalled it, supposing it his own," said the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table. After this dictum in ethics, Dr. Holmes enunciated a subtle psychologic truth, which is known to all conscientious writers, and which should be made known to all amateur literary detectives: "It is impossible to tell, in a great many cases, whether a comparison which suddenly suggests itself is a new conception or a recollection. I told you the other day that I never wrote a line of verse that seemed to me comparatively good but it appeared old at once, and often as if it has been borrowed." Sheridan bears witness to the same effect in the preface to the 'Rivals,' when he says that "faded ideas float in memory like half-forgotten dreams; and the imagination in its fullest enjoyments becomes suspicious of its offspring, and doubts whether it has created or adopted." Perhaps the testimony of Sheridan is not altogether beyond suspicion; he had an easy conscience and a marvellous faculty of assimilation, and it may be that

he was apologetically making the plea of confession and avoidance, as the lawyers call it. But I think that Lord Tennyson, Sir Walter Scott, and Mr. Lowell are unimpeachable witnesses. It is with malice prepense that I have quoted from them frequently and at length, and perhaps in excess, that I might establish my case not out of my own mouth, but out of theirs.

After all, there is little need to lay stress on the innocence of many if not most of the coincidences with which the history of literature is studded. The garden is not large, and those who cultivate it must often walk down the same path, sometimes side by side, and sometimes one after another, even though the follower neither wishes nor intends to tread on his predecessor's heels or to walk in his footsteps. They may gather a nosegay of the same flowers of speech. They may even pluck the same passion-flower, not knowing that any one has ever before broken a blossom from that branch. Indeed, when we consider how small the area is, how few are the possible complications of plot, how easily the poetic vocabulary is exhausted, the wonder is really, not that there are so many parallel passages, but that there are so few. In the one field which is not circumscribed there is very little repetition: human

nature is limitless, and characters comparatively rarely pass from one book to another. The dramatists and the romancers have no choice but to treat anew as best they may the well-worn incidents and the weary plots; the poets happen on the same conceits generation after generation; but the dramatists and the romancers and the poets know that there is no limit to the variety of man, and that human nature is as deep and as boundless and as inexhaustible as the ocean. No matter how heavy a draft Shakspere and Molière may have made, no matter how skilfully and how successfully Dickens and Thackeray may have angled, no matter how great the take of Hawthorne and Poe, there are still as good fish in the sea of humanity as ever were caught. And I offer this fact, that we do not find the coincidence in character which we cannot help seeing in plot and in language, as a proof that most apparent plagiarism is quite unconscious and due chiefly to the paucity of material.

Hitherto I have considered only the similarity which was unconscious. Originality is difficult; it is never accidental; and it is to be obtained only by solitary confinement and hard labor. To make his fiction out of whole cloth, to spin his net, spider-like, out of himself, is one of the highest

achievements of the intellect. Only a rare genius may do this, and he must do it rarely. A man may always draw from the common stock without compunction, and there are many circumstances under which he may borrow unhesitatingly from other authors. For example, Mr. Haggard has recently been encompassed about by a cloud of false witnesses, accusing him of having plagiarized certain episodes of his story, 'King Solomon's Mines,' from a certain book of travels. He promptly denied the charge, and of course it fell to the ground at once. But had he done what he was accused of doing, there would have been no harm in it. Mr. Haggard, in writing a romance of Africa, would have been perfectly justified in using the observations and experiences of African travellers. Facts are the foundation of fiction, and the novelist and the romancer, the dramatist and the poet, may make free with labors of the traveller, the historian, the botanist, and the astronomer. Within reason, the imaginative author may help himself to all that the scientific author has stored up. One might even go so far as to say that science—in which I include history—exists to supply facts for fiction, and that it has not wholly accomplished its purpose until it has been transmuted in the imagination of the poet. If Mr. Haggard had made

use of a dozen books of African travel in the composition of that thrilling and delightful romance of adventure, 'King Solomon's Mines,' there would have been no more taint of plagiary about it than there was in Shakspere's reworking of the old chronicles into his historical plays.

Shakspere and Molière borrowed from Plautus, as Plautus had borrowed from Menander; and this again is not plagiarism. Every literary worker has a right to draw from the accumulated store of the past, so long as he does not attempt to conceal what he has done nor to take credit for what is not his own invention, and so long as he has wholly absorbed and assimilated and steeped in his own gray matter what he has derived from his predecessors. The elder Dumas has told us how he found some of the scattered elements of his virile and vigorous drama 'Henri III.' in Anquetil and in Scott and in Schiller; but the play is his, none the less; and this was no plagiarism, for he had mixed himself, with what he borrowed, "an incalculable increment," as Mr. Lowell said of Gray. 'Henri III.' lives with its own life, which Dumas gave it, and which is as different as possible from the life of the fragments of Anquetil, Scott, and Schiller, each of these again differing one from the other. It was as unlike as may be to that merely literary

imitation which Hawthorne compared to a plaster cast.

Another French dramatist, M. Sardou, had profited by the reading of Poe's 'Purloined Letter' when he sat down to plan his 'Pattes de Mouche'; but it is absurd to talk of plagiary here, and to call M. Sardou's charming comedy a dramatization of Poe's short story, for, although the bare essential idea is the same, the development is radically different. And in like manner Poe found an incident in Mr. Mudford's 'Iron Shroud' which probably suggested to him his own appalling tale of the 'Pit and the Pendulum.' Here what Poe took from Mr. Mudford was very little compared with what he contributed himself; and in any discussion of plagiarism quite the most important question is the relative value to the borrower of the thing borrowed. If he has flocks of his own, he may lift the ewe lamb of his neighbor, and only laborious dulness will object. The plagiarist, in fact, is the man who steals his brooms ready made, because he does not know how to make them. Dumas and M. Sardou and Poe were men having a highly developed faculty of invention, and seeking originality diligently. Those from whom they borrowed have no more right to claim the resulting works than has the spectator who lends a coin to a

conjurer a right to consider himself a partner in the ingenious trick the conjurer performs with it. If this be plagiary, make the most of it. Let us all wish for more of it. And this reminds me of a little story, as Lincoln used to say: in the darkest days of our war, when defeat followed defeat, and Grant alone was victorious at Vicksburg, some busybody went to Lincoln and told him that Grant drank whiskey. "Does he?" said the President, gravely. "Do you happen to know what kind of whiskey it is? Because I should like to send a barrel of it to some of the other generals."

"Far indeed am I from asserting that books, as well as nature, are not, and ought not to be, suggestive to the poet," wrote Lord Tennyson. "I am sure that I myself and many others find a peculiar charm in those passages of such great masters as Virgil or Milton, where they adopt the creation of a bygone poet, and reclothe it, more or less, according to their fancy." Wordsworth said that Gray helped himself from everybody and everywhere; but what Gray made out of these old bits borrowed from others was a new poem, and it was his own. In the latest editions of Gray's poems, as Mr. Lowell has put it picturesquely, "The thin line of text stands at the top of the page like cream, and below it is the skim-milk drawn from many

milky mothers of the herd out of which it has risen." It was because the author of 'Evangeline' followed the example of the author of the 'Elegy' that Poe was able to write his foolish paper on 'Mr. Longfellow and other Plagiarists'—a wanton attack which Longfellow bore with beautiful serenity. One must set a plagiarist to cry "Stop thief!" and Poe was not above stealing his brooms, or at least his smaller brushes, ready made. We may absolve him for levying on Mudford for the 'Pit and the Pendulum,' but in his 'Marginalia' he retailed as his own Sheridan's joke about the phœnix and Whitbread's poulterer's description of it.

I believe that both Ben Jonson and the elder Dumas defended their forays into the marches of their elders, and even of their contemporaries, by the bold assertion that genius does not steal, it conquers. And there is force in the plea. Genius takes by right of eminent domain, and rectifies its frontier by annexing outlying territory, making fruitful that which before was but a barren waste. In literature, that is his at last who makes best use of it. And here is the essence of the controversy in a nutshell: it is plagiarism for an author to take anything from another author and reproduce it nakedly; but it is not necessarily plagiarism if he reclothes it and dresses it up anew. If the second

comer can improve on the work of the first comer, if he makes it over and makes it better, and makes it his own, we accept the result and ask no questions. But if he make no change, or if he make a change for the worse, we send for the police at once. A man may be allowed to keep his borrowed brats, if he clothe them and feed them and educate them, and if he make no attempt to disguise them, and if he is not guilty of the fatal mistake of disfiguring them "as the gypsies do stolen children to make 'em pass for their own." (This figure, by the way, was an orphan of Churchill's when Sheridan came along and adopted it.) Thus, we find it hard to forgive Herrick for one of his thefts from Suckling, when he took the loveliest lines of the lovely 'Ballad upon a Wedding':

> Her feet beneath her petticoat,
> Like little mice, stole in and out,
> As if they feared the light,

and in his 'Hesperides' he spoilt them to

> Her pretty feet, like snails, did creep a little out.

Nothing is further from my desire than that I should be taken either as a defender of plagiarism or as a denier of its existence. It exists, and it is

an ugly crime. What I am seeking to show is that it is not as frequent as many may imagine, and more especially that much which is called plagiarism is not criminal at all, but perfectly legitimate. For instance, Mr. Charles Reade's incorporation of fragments of the 'Dialogues' of Erasmus in the 'Cloister and the Hearth,' and of Swift's 'Polite Conversation' in the 'Wandering Heir,' was a proper and even a praiseworthy use of preëxisting material. But Mr. Reade did not always remain within his rights, and it is impossible to doubt that his 'Portrait' was first hung in the private gallery of Mme. Reybaud, and that some of his 'Hard Cash' was filched from the coffers of the 'Pauvres de Paris' of MM. Brisebarre and Nus. Mme. Reybaud's picture was not a Duchess of Devonshire which a man might so fall in love with that he could not help stealing it — indeed, it is not easy to discover why Mr. Reade wanted it; but the drama of MM. Brisebarre and Nus is ingeniously pathetic, and although no one has made as skilful use of its fable as Mr. Reade, it has served to suggest also Miss Braddon's 'Rupert Godwin, Banker,' Mr. Sterling Coyne's 'Fraud and its Victims,' and Mr. Dion Boucicault's 'Streets of New-York.'

It is in the theatre that we hear the most accusations of plagiarism. Apparently there is an unwillingness on the part of the public to believe that a play can be original, and a dramatist nowadays is forced not only to affirm his innocence, but almost to prove it. I am inclined to think that the habit of adapting from the French—a habit now happily in its decline—is responsible for this state of things, for the laxity of morals on the part of the author, and for the general and ungenerous suspicion on the side of the public.

It is the playwright's fault, one must confess, if the playgoer is doubtful as to the paternity of every new play. So many pieces were brought out as "new and original," which were neither original nor new, that the playgoer was confirmed in his suspicions; and he finds it hard to surrender the habit of doubt even now when a French drama in an English or American theatre generally bears the French author's name, and when the best work of the best English and American dramatists is really their own. Mr. Herman Merivale and Mr. Bronson Howard, Mr. Gilbert and Mr. Pinero, and other of the little band of young playmakers whose work seems to promise a possible revival of the English drama as a form of art and a department of litera-

ture, are quite above the meanness of taking a foreign author's plot without authority or acknowledgment. Yet they suffer for the sins of their predecessors.

Credit, said a great economist, is suspicion asleep; and the saying is as true in the playmaking profession as it is in the trade of moneymaking. Suspicion is suffering from an acute attack of insomnia just now, and many dramatic critics are quick to declare a resemblance between Macedon and Monmouth, if there be salmons in both, and when the dramatist is shown to have lifted a tiny lamb they are ready to hang him for a stalwart sheep. Now, there is no department of literature in which similarities are as inevitable as they are in the drama. I have tried to show already that the elements of the drama are comparatively few, and that the possible combinations are not many. There are only a few themes suited for treatment in the theatre, and many a topic which a novelist can handle to advantage the dramatist is debarred from attempting by the conditions of the stage. A certain likeness there must needs be between the new plays and the old plays in which the same subject has been discussed by the dramatist. And these coincidences may be as innocent as they are "curious."

I remember that when Mr. Dion Boucicault originally produced the 'Shaughraun'—it was at Wallack's Theatre in New-York ten or twelve years ago—there was an attempt to prove that he had taken his plot from an earlier Irish drama by Mr. Wybert Reeve. At first sight the similarity between the two plays was really striking, and parallel columns were erected with ease. But a closer investigation revealed that all that was common to these two plays was common to fifty other Irish plays, and that all that gave value to the 'Shaughraun'—the humor, the humanity, the touches of pathos, the quick sense of character—was absent from the other play. There is a formula for the mixing of an Irish drama, and Mr. Reeve and Mr. Boucicault had each prepared his piece according to this formula, making due admixture of the Maiden-in-Distress, the Patriot-in-danger-of-his-Life, and the Cowardly Informer, who have furnished forth many score plays since first the Red-Coats were seen in the Green Isle. Both dramatists had drawn from the common stock of types and incidents, and there was really no reason to believe that Mr. Boucicault was indebted to Mr. Reeve for anything, because Mr. Reeve had little in his play which had not been in twenty plays before, and which Mr. Boucicault could not have put together out of his

recollections of these without any knowledge of that. Of course there is a great difference between the original and the commonplace, but if a man cannot be the former it is no sin to be the latter. Commonplace is not plagiarism. That a coat is threadbare is no proof that it has been stolen—on the contrary.

To any one understanding the subtlety of mental processes, and especially the movements of the imagination, a similarity of situation is often not only not a proof of plagiarism, but a proof that there has been no plagiarism. This sounds like a paradox, but I think I can make my meaning clear and evident. When we find the same strikingly original idea differently handled by two authors, we may absolve the later from any charge of literary theft if we find that his treatment of the novel situation differs from his predecessor's. If the treatment is different, we may assume that the second writer was not aware of the existence of the first writer's work. And for this reason: if the later author were acquainted with the startlingly novel effect of the earlier author, he could not have treated the same subject without repeating certain of the minor peculiarities also. He must perforce have taken over with the theme in some measure the treatment also. All literary workmen know

how difficult it is to disentangle the minor details from the main idea, and to strip the idea naked, discarding the mere detail. Had the second writer known of the first writer's work, he could not help being influenced by it. Thus it is that a similarity of subject may be evidence of originality. There is a short story by FitzJames O'Brien, called 'What Was It?' in which there is a palpable but invisible being. Since this was first published there have been two other short stories on the same idea, one published in the *Atlantic Monthly* by Mr. Charles de Kay, and the other published anonymously in the *Cornhill Magazine*. The tale in the *Cornhill* coincides in detail as well as in idea, and it is almost impossible to declare its anonymous author guiltless of plagiarism. But Mr. de Kay's story was wholly different in its elaboration, and the two tales, although the chief figure in each was a being palpable but invisible, were as unlike as possible. Here there was obviously no plagiarism. The coat — to take up the figure of the last paragraph — was made of the same cloth, but its cut was not the same.

(Lately — since this paper first appeared — the central figure of FitzJames O'Brien's story has been seen again in 'Le Horla' of M. Guy de Maupassant, but with a treatment so personal and a

modification so striking that it seems impossible that the French author has not happened on it independently,—however easy it might be to prepare parallel columns to prove him a plagiarist.)

Three or four years ago the *Saturday Review* laid down the law of plagiarism in three clauses: 1. "In the first place, we would permit any great modern artist to recut and to set anew the literary gems of classic times and of the Middle Ages." 2. "Our second rule would be that all authors have an equal right to the stock situations which are the common store of humanity." 3. "Finally, we presume that an author has a right to borrow or buy an idea, if he frankly acknowledges the transaction." In commenting on this code, I suggested that there might be a difficulty of interpretation in the first clause, for who is to declare any modern a great artist? In the second clause the law is clearly stated, and whether any given situation is or is not common property is a question of fact for the jury. The only difficulty in applying the third clause is in defining precisely the degree of frankness and fulness required in acknowledging the indebtedness. But hypercriticism is out of place in considering a suggestion as valuable, as needful just now, and as neatly put up as this triple law of the contributor to the *Saturday*

Review. A general acceptance of this code would tend to clear the air of the vague charges of plagiarism which hang in heavy clouds over the literary journals. Before we can decide whether an author is guilty of the offence, we must be agreed on what constitutes the crime, what are its elements, and what are the exemptions. I have ventured to draw up the statute of exemptions in a form slightly different from that given in the *Saturday Review*, a little broader and stronger, and perhaps a little simpler: A writer is at liberty to use the work of his predecessors as he will, provided always that (1) he does not take credit (even by implication) for what he has not invented, and (2) that he does not in any way infringe on the pecuniary rights of the original owner.

When M. Sardou brought out the farcical comedy 'Les Pommes du Voisin,' he was accused of having stolen it from a tale of Charles de Bernard, and he retorted instantly with evidence that he had the permission of the holders of the Bernard copyrights, who were to share in the profits of the play. Here M. Sardou was innocent under the second clause of my law, but guilty under the first, insomuch as he had concealed his indebtedness to Charles de Bernard and had taken credit for an invention which was not his own. When

Mr. Charles Reade turned Mrs. Burnett's 'That Lass o' Lowrie's' into a play called 'Joan,' without asking the permission of the American author, he was guilty under the second clause and innocent under the first, for there was no concealment of the source of the drama.

With a proper understanding of what is and what is not plagiarism, there should go a greater circumspection in bringing the accusation. Plagiarism is the worst of literary crimes. It is theft, neither more nor less. All who desire to uphold the honor of literature, and to see petty larceny and highway robbery meet with their just punishment, are concerned that the charge shall not be idly brought or carelessly answered. But now so often has the amateur literary detective cried "Wolf" that patience is exhausted, and accusations of literary theft have been flung broadcast, until they may be met with a smile of contempt. This is not as it should be. It is contrary to public policy that the literary conscience should become callous. The charge of plagiarism is very serious, and it should not be lightly brought or lightly borne. The accusation is very easy to make and very hard to meet; it should be a boomerang, which, when skilfully thrown, brings down the quarry with a single deadly blow, but which,

when carelessly cast, rebounds swiftly and breaks the head of him who threw it. The man who makes the charge of plagiarism should be ready to stand to his guns, and to pay the penalty of having opened fire. And the penalty for having failed to prove the accusation should be heavy. The accuser should be put under bonds, so to speak, to make his charge good, and if he loses his case he should be cast in damages. It is not right to force an author either unjustly to lie under an accusation of theft, or to undergo the annoyance and expense of refuting vague allegations, urged in wanton carelessness by some irresponsible person. Nothing is more disagreeable or thankless than a dispute with an inferior. Years ago Dr. Holmes declared the hydrostatic paradox of controversy: "Controversy equalizes fools and wise men in the same way—and the fools know it!"

If we were to hold to a strict accountability the feeble-minded persons who delight in pointing out alleged coincidences and similarities, if we were to discourage the accusation of plagiarism, except on abundant evidence, if we were to declare that any man who fails to sustain his charge shall be discredited, we should do much to put down plagiarism itself. When the difficulties and the dangers of making the accusation are increased—

and it is now neither difficult nor dangerous—the number of accusations will be decreased at once, and in time the public conscience will be quickened. Then it would be possible to get serious attention for the serious case of literary theft, and then the writer who might be found with stolen wares concealed about his person would be visited with swifter condemnation and with more certain punishment. But now all we can do is to remember that

The man who plants cabbages imitates too.

(1886)

III

THE TRUE THEORY OF THE PREFACE

THE TRUE THEORY OF THE PREFACE —

A Confidential Communication to all Makers of Books.

PPARENTLY the true theory of the Preface is apprehended by very few of those who are, by trade, makers of books—to use Carlyle's characterization of his own calling. Mr. Matthew Arnold, indeed, master of all literary arts, was highly skilful in the use of the Preface, which, in his hands, served to drive home the bolt of his argument, and to rivet it firmly on the other side. Those who have read one of Mr. Arnold's prefaces know what to expect, and fall to, with increased appetite, on the book itself. But not many men may wield the weapons of Mr. Arnold, and very few, as I have hinted already, are skilled in the use of the Preface. Many, ignorant of its utility, choose to ignore it altogether. More, accepting it as a necessary evil, acquit themselves of it in the most perfunctory fashion. There is slight survival of the tradition which made the appeal to

the Gentle Reader a fit and proper custom. But nowadays the appeal is useless, and the Gentle Reader—oh, where is he? In the days when there was a Gentle Reader there was no giant critic to appal the trembling author with his thunderous Fee-Fo-Fum. In the beginning, when printing was a new invention, it served for the multiplication of books alone; newspapers lagged long after; and it is only in the present century that the reading public began to allow that middleman, the critic, to taste and try before they buy. The Preface *in formâ pauperis*, in which the author confessed his sinful publication and implored forgiveness, urging as his sole excuse "hunger and request of friends," is now as much out of date and as antiquated in style as the fulsome dedication to a noble patron. The two lived together and died together about the time when the working man of letters moved out of his lodgings in Grub Street.

The Preface in which the writer takes a humorous view of his own work is a late device; it is capable of good results in the hands of a literary artist like Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, who suggests in the pages which prepare us to enjoy his record of 'An Inland Voyage' that in his Preface an author should stand afar off and look at his

book affectionately, if he will, but dispassionately. "It is best, in such circumstances," he asserts, "to represent a delicate shade of manner between humility and superiority, as if the book had been written by some one else, and you had merely run over it and inserted what was good." Clever as this is, and characteristic and delightful as its humor is, I feel constrained to assert my belief that Mr. Stevenson is not standing on the solid ground of a sound theory. Mr. Stevenson is a writer of exceptional gifts, and he may venture on liberties which would be fatal to the rest of us: his example affords no safe rule for ordinary mortals. In the Preface a man must take himself seriously, for a Preface is a very serious thing. It cannot be denied that the humorous attitude is much wiser than the self-depreciatory and the apologetic, which are, unfortunately, far more common. A humorist has, at least, a wholesome belief in himself, and he can hide his doubting sorrow with a smile; whereas the plaintive author, who confesses his weakness with tears in his eyes, is a sorry spectacle that no critic need respect.

The cause of the apologetic Preface is obvious enough. Although printed at the beginning of the book, the Preface is the final thing written. When the long labor of composition is over at

last, and the intense strain is relaxed suddenly, then it is that the author sits down to his Preface. There is a cooling of the enthusiasm which has carried him through his work; there is often, indeed, a violent reaction; and it is at this moment of depression and despondency, when the writer is a prey to dread doubt about his book and about himself, that the Preface has to be composed. Just then the author sometimes wonders whether it is not his duty to throw what he has written into the fire, and so rid the world of a misconceived and misshapen abortion. Rarely is this feeling, acute as it is, and painful, quite strong enough to make the author actually cast his MS. into the grate—never until, like Pendennis, he has made sure that the fire is out. But his morbidity of spirit and his self-distrust find vent in the Preface. Not unfrequently is the Preface worded like a last dying speech and confession. As M. Octave Uzanne says in the lively Preface to his lively little book called the 'Caprices d'un Bibliophile,' "the Preface is the salutation to the reader, and too often, alas! the terrible salutation of the gladiators to Cæsar—*Morituri te salutant!*"

This is rank heresy: and all such heretics should be burnt at the stake, or at least they should have their books burnt in the market-place by the com-

mon hangman. The Preface is not the fit time and occasion for the author to exhale his plaints, to make confession of his sins, and to promise to do penance. It is perhaps not too much to say that the Preface is the most important part of a book, except the Index. Anybody can write a book, such as it is, but only a gifted man, or a man trained in the art, can write a Preface, such as it ought to be.

In the Preface the author must put his best foot foremost, and this is often the *premier pas qui coûte*. A Preface should be appetizing, alluring, enticing. As a battle well joined is half-won, as a work well begun is half-done, so a book with a good Preface is half-way on the high-road to success. In the Preface the author offers his first-fruits and pours his libation. In the Preface the author sets a sample of his text as in a show-window. In the Preface the author strikes the key-note of his work. Therefore must the good Preface set forth the supreme excellence of the book it should precede, as a brass-band goes before a regiment. As delicately, and yet as unhesitatingly, as the composer knows how, the Preface should sound triumphant pæans of exultant self-praise. There is no need that a Preface should be long; it takes a large cart to carry a

score of empty casks, almost worthless, while a ten-thousand-dollar diamond may go snugly in a waistcoat-pocket. But a Preface must be strong enough to do its allotted work. Now, its allotted work — and here we are laying bare the secret of the true theory of the Preface — is to furnish to the unwitting critic a syllabus or a skeleton of the criticism which you wish to have him write.

The thoughtless may declare that "nobody reads a Preface"; but there could be no more fatal blunder. Perhaps that impalpable entity, the general reader, may skip it not infrequently; but that tangible terror, the critic, never fails to read the Preface, even when he reads no farther. Now and again the general reader may dispense with the reading of the Preface, as legislative assemblies dispense with the reading of the minutes of the last meeting, that they may the sooner get to the business in hand. The critic is a very different sort of person from the general reader, and it is meat and drink to him to read a Preface. The author should recognize this fact; he should accept the altered conditions of the Preface. Consider for a moment what the Preface was, what it is now, and what it should be. It was addressed to the reader, who read it rarely. It is now, as we have seen above, anything or nothing, some-

times absent, often artless, seldom apt. It should be a private letter from the author to the critic indicating the lines upon which he (the author) would like him (the critic) to frame an opinion and to declare a judgment. A good Preface is like the trick modern magicians use, when, under pretence of giving us free choice, they force us to draw the card they have already determined upon. So if a book have a proper Preface, contrived with due art, the critic cannot choose but write about it as the author wishes. A master of the craft will blow his own horn in the Preface of his book so skilfully and so unobtrusively that only a faint echo shall linger in the ear of the critic, iterating and reiterating the *Leit-Motiv* of self-praise until the charmed reviewer repeats it unconsciously.

Of course it is not easy for a gentleman to praise himself publicly as he feels he deserves to be praised. The pleasantest and most profitable Preface for the beginner in book-making is the introduction by one of the acknowledged leaders of literature. Then, by a strange reversal of custom, it is the celebrity who waits at the door like an usher to declare the titles of the young man who is about to cross the threshold for the first time. Thus the young author has granted to him a passport by which he may gain admittance where else

he might not enter. Jules Janin was a master-hand at the issuing of these introductory letters of credit; he was easy and good-natured, and rarely or never did he refuse a novice the alms of a Preface. Janin had the ear of the public, and he liked to lead the public by the ear. Perhaps, too, he liked the opportunity of using his high praise of the new-comer slyly to deal a blow between the ribs or under the belt of some old favorite whose reputation came between him and the sun. He who makes the Preface to another's book stands on a vantage-ground and is free from responsibility; he may classify under heads the things that he hates, and then, in accordance with the precept and the practice of Donnybrook, hit a head wherever he sees it. Truly a man may wish, "O that mine enemy would let me write his Preface! Could I not damn with faint praise and stab with sharp insinuendo?"—to use the labor-saving and much-needed word thoughtlessly invented by the sable legislator of South Carolina.

The Preface by another hand is often a pleasant device for the display of international courtesy. Merimée introduced Turgenef to the Parisians. In the United States an English author may be presented to the public by an American celebrity, and in Great Britain an American book may be pub-

lished with a voucher of its orthodoxy signed by a dignitary of the Church. The exalted friend of the author who provides the introduction, if he be but a true friend, may praise far more highly than even the wiliest author would dare to praise himself. If he understands the obligation of his position and does his duty, he should blare the trumpet boldly and bang the big-drum mightily, and bid the whole world walk up and see the show which is just about to begin. Even if the public be dull and laggard and refuse to be charmed, the author has at least the signal satisfaction for once in his life of hearing his effort properly appreciated at its exact value. If by any chance he is a truly modest man — a rare bird indeed, a white black-bird — he may have some slight qualms of conscience on seeing himself over-praised in the pages of his own book. But these qualms are subdued easily enough for the most part. "I never saw an author in my life — saving perhaps one," says the Autocrat, "that did not purr as audibly as a full-grown domestic cat on having his fur smoothed the right way by a skilful hand."

In default of a friend speaking as one having authority, the author must perforce write his own Preface and declare his own surpassing virtues. The old-fashioned Preface, inscribed to the Gentle

Reader of the vague and doubtful past, often failed to reach its address. The Preface of the new school, constructed according to the true theory, is intended solely for the critic. Now, the critic is the very reverse of the Gentle Reader, and he must be addressed accordingly. He studies the Preface carefully to see what bits he can chip away to help build his own review. "A good Preface is as essential to put the reader into good humor as a good prologue to a play," so the author of the 'Curiosities of Literature' tells us; but nowadays our plays have no prologues, and it is the critic whom the Preface must put into good humor. Now, the critic is not the ogre he is often represented; he is a man like ourselves, a man having to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, a man often over-worked and often bound down to a distasteful task. He is quick to take a hint. For his benefit the Preface should fairly bristle with hints. The Preface should insinuate adroitly that the book it precedes is — in the choice phrase of the advertisement — "a felt-want filled." This need not be done brutally and nakedly. On the contrary, it is better to lead the mind of the critic by easy steps. Dwell on the importance of the subject, and declare that in the present work it has been regarded for the first time from a new and particular point

of view. Point out, modestly but firmly, the special advantages which the author has enjoyed, and which make him an authority on the subject. Casually let drop, in quotation marks, a few words of high praise once addressed to the author by a great man, now no longer with us, and trust that you have done all in your power to merit such gratifying encomiums. You may even venture to intimate that although you cannot expect the profane vulgar to see the transcendent merit of your work, yet the favored few of keener insight will recognize it at once: flattery is a legal-tender without Act of Congress, and the critic accepts it as readily, perhaps, as the author. The critic is only a fellow human being after all, and like the rest of our fellow human beings he is quite ready to take us at our own valuation. Hold the head up; look the world in the eye; and he is a churlish critic who does not at least treat you with respect.

But if the Preface is weak in tone, if it is nerveless, if it is apologetic, then the critic takes the author at his word and has a poor opinion of him, and expresses that opinion in plain language. If you throw yourself on the mercy of the court, the critic gives you at once the full penalty of the law. Confess a lamb and the critic hangs you for a sheep. Give him but five lines of Preface

and he can damn any book. Acknowledge any obligation, however slight, and the critic pounces upon it; and your character for originality is lost. Every admission will be used against you. He believes that you undervalue your indebtedness to others; and if you rashly call his attention to it, he tries to balance the account by overstating your debt. I know an author who had studied a subject for years, contributing from time to time to periodicals an occasional paper on certain of its sub-divisions, until at last he was ready to write his book about it; his honesty moved him to say in the Preface of the volume that he had made use of articles in certain magazines and reviews. He did not specifically declare that these articles were his own work, and so one critic called the book "a compilation from recent periodical literature," leaving the reader to infer that the author had been caught decking himself out in borrowed plumes. Two friends of the same author kindly consented to read the proof-sheets of another of his books; and in the Preface thereof he thanked them by name for "the invaluable aid they have kindly given me in the preparation of these pages for the press." One critic took advantage of this acknowledgment to credit the two friends with a material share in the work of which they had only read the

proof. The author of that remarkable book, the 'Story of a Country Town,' wrote a most pathetic Preface, a cry of doubt wrung from his heart; and there was scarcely a single favorable review of the volume the praise of which had not been dampened by the Preface.

The only safe rule is resolutely to set forth the merits of the book in the Preface, and to be silent as to its faults. Do not apologize for anything. Confess nothing. If there are omissions, pride yourself on them. If the book has an inevitable defect, boast of it. A man has the qualities of his faults, says the French maxim; in a Preface, a man must defiantly set up his faults as qualities. Of course this needs to be done with the greatest skill; and it is seen in perfection only in the Prefaces of those who have both taste and tact, and who combine a masculine vigor of handling with a feminine delicacy of touch. Anybody can write a book,—as I have said already,—but only a man singularly gifted by nature and richly cultivated by art can write a Preface as it ought to be written.

If common decency requires absolutely that the author confess something, an indebtedness to a predecessor, or the like, even then this confession must not encumber and disfigure the Preface. Dismiss the thought of the confession wholly from

your mind while you are composing the Preface. Then declare your indebtedness and avow any of the seven deadly sins of which you may have been guilty — in a note, in a modest and unobtrusive little note, either at the end of the book or at the bottom of the page. The critic always reads the Preface, but only a man really interested in the subject ever digs into a note. A foot-note, lurking shyly in fine type, is perhaps the best place for a man to confess his sins in. And yet there is a great advantage in postponing the bad quarter of an hour as long as possible — that is to say, to the very end of the book. When the aspiring dramatist brought his tragedy to Sheridan as the manager of Drury Lane, he said that he had written the prologue himself and he had ventured to hope that perhaps Mr. Sheridan would favor him with an epilogue. "An epilogue, my dear sir," cried Sheridan; "it will never come to that!"

In talking over the true theory of the Preface with friends engaged in other trades than that of letters, I have found that the same principle obtains elsewhere. A learned professor told me that he never declared the limitations of his course in his first lecture; he preferred to begin by getting the attention of the students; when he had once acquired this, why, then he found occasion casu-

ally in the second or third, or even the fourth lecture, to let his hearers know, as if by accident, just what bounds he proposed to set to his discourse. The case of the dramatist is even harder, for an acknowledgment of any kind printed in the playbill, before the curtain rises on the first act for the first time, is more dangerous than the most apologetic Preface. Dramatists have always availed themselves of the royal privilege of prigging — or, if this sound unseemly, let us say, of taking their goods wherever they found them. So many playwrights have presented as new and original plays which were neither new nor original, that critics are wary and suspicious. They are inclined to believe the worst of their fellow-man when he has written a play: after all, as M. Thiers said, it is so easy not to write a tragedy in five acts. But if a man has written a tragedy in five acts or a comedy in three, if a man is an honest man, and if he is under some trifling obligations to some forgotten predecessor, what is he to do? The critics are sure to suppose that the author has understated his indebtedness. If he say he took a hint for a scene or a character from Schiller or Sir Walter Scott or Alexandre Dumas, the critics are likely to record that the play is derived from Schiller, or Scott, or Dumas. If he say his plot

was suggested by a part of an old play, they are likely to set it down as founded on the old play. If he confess that his piece is remotely based on another in a foreign tongue, they call it an adaptation. And if he, in the excess of his honesty, presents his play humbly as an adaptation, they go a step farther and accept it as a translation, and are even capable of finding fault with it because it does not exactly reproduce the original. If Mr. Pinero, when in his charming comedy, the 'Squire,' he sought to bring the scent of the hay across the footlights, had made an allusion to Mr. Hardy's story, not a few dramatic critics would have called the play an adaptation of the story — which it was not. It is impossible for the dramatist to frame an acknowledgment which shall declare with mathematical precision his indebtedness to any given predecessor for a bit of color, for a vague suggestion of character, for a stray hint of a situation, or for a small but pregnant knot of man and motive. It cannot be set down in plain figures. Unfortunately for him who writes for the stage, the playbill which everybody reads is the only Preface; and there are no foot-notes possible. The dramatist has to confess his obligation at the very worst moment, or else forever after hold his peace.

"A Preface, being the entrance to a book, should invite by its beauty. An elegant porch announces the splendor of the interior," said the elder Disraeli, setting forth the theory of the Preface as it was in the past. But this is not the new and true theory of the Preface, which should be written in letters of gold in the study of every maker of books :— "If you want to have your book criticized favorably, give yourself a good notice in the Preface!" This is the true theory, in the very words of its discoverer. If it is not absolutely sound and water-tight, it is, at all events, an admirable working hypothesis. Although others had had faint glimmerings of the truth, it was left for a friend of mine to formulate it finally and as I have given it here. To him are due the thanks of all makers of books — and he is a publisher.

(1885)

IV

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SHORT-STORY

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SHORT-STORY.

F it chance that artists fall to talking about their art, it is the critic's place to listen, that he may pick up a little knowledge. Of late, certain of the novelists of Great Britain and the United States have been discussing the principles and the practice of the art of writing stories. Mr. Howells declared his warm appreciation of Mr. Henry James's novels; Mr. Stevenson made public a delightful plea for Romance; Mr. Besant lectured gracefully on the Art of Fiction; and Mr. James modestly presented his views by way of supplement and criticism. The discussion took a wide range. With more or less fulness it covered the proper aim and intent of the novelist, his material and his methods, his success, his rewards, social and pecuniary, and the morality of his work and of his art. But, with all its extension, the discussion did not include one important branch of the art of fiction: it did not consider at all the minor art of the Short-story. Although neither Mr.

Howells nor Mr. James, Mr. Besant nor Mr. Stevenson specifically limited his remarks to those longer, and, in the picture dealer's sense of the word, more "important," tales known as Novels, and, although, of course, their general criticisms of the abstract principles of the art of fiction applied quite as well to the Short-story as to the Novel, yet all their concrete examples were full-length Novels, and the Short-story, as such, received no recognition at all.

The difference between a Novel and a Novelette is one of length only: a Novelette is a brief Novel. But the difference between a Novel and a Short-story is a difference of kind. A true Short-story is something other and something more than a mere story which is short. A true Short-story differs from the Novel chiefly in its essential unity of impression. In a far more exact and precise use of the word, a Short-story has unity as a Novel cannot have it. Often, it may be noted by the way, the Short-story fulfils the three false unities of the French classic drama: it shows one action in one place on one day. A Short-story deals with a single character, a single event, a single emotion, or the series of emotions called forth by a single situation. Poe's paradox that a poem cannot greatly exceed a hundred lines in length under penalty of

ceasing to be one poem and breaking into a string of poems, may serve to suggest the precise difference between the Short-story and the Novel. The Short-story is the single effect, complete and self-contained, while the Novel is of necessity broken into a series of episodes. Thus the Short-story has, what the Novel cannot have, the effect of "totality," as Poe called it, the unity of impression. The Short-story is not only not a chapter out of a Novel, or an incident or an episode extracted from a longer tale, but at its best it impresses the reader with the belief that it would be spoiled if it were made larger or if it were incorporated into a more elaborate work. The difference in spirit and in form between the Lyric and the Epic is scarcely greater than the difference between the Short-story and the Novel; and the 'Raven' and 'How we brought the good news from Ghent to Aix' are not more unlike the 'Lady of the Lake' and 'Paradise Lost,' in form and in spirit, than the 'Luck of Roaring Camp' and the 'Man without a Country,' two typical Short-stories, are unlike 'Vanity Fair' and the 'Heart of Midlothian,' two typical Novels.

Another great difference between the Short-story and the Novel lies in the fact that the Novel, nowadays at least, must be a love-tale, while the

Short-story need not deal with love at all. Although 'Vanity Fair' was a Novel without a Hero, nearly every other Novel has a hero and a heroine, and the novelist, however unwillingly, must concern himself in their love-affairs. But the writer of Short-stories is under no bonds of this sort. Of course he may tell a tale of love if he choose, and if love enters into his tale naturally and to its enriching; but he need not bother with love at all unless he please. Some of the best of Short-stories are love-stories too,—Mr. Aldrich's 'Marjory Daw' for instance, Mr. Stimson's 'Mrs. Knollys,' Mr. Bunner's 'Love in Old Cloathes'; but more of them are not love-stories at all. If we were to pick out the ten best Short-stories, I think we should find that fewer than half of them made any mention at all of love. In the 'Snow Image' and in the 'Ambitious Guest,' in the 'Gold Bug' and in the 'Fall of the House of Usher,' in 'My Double, and how he Undid me,' in 'Devil-Puzzlers,' in the 'Outcasts of Poker Flat,' in 'Jean-ah Poquelin,' in 'A Bundle of Letters,' there is little or no mention of the love of man for woman, which is the chief topic of conversation in a Novel. While the Novel cannot get on without love, the Short-story can. Since love is almost the only thing which will give interest to a long story, the writer of

Novels has to get love into his tales as best he may, even when the subject rebels and when he himself is too old to take any interest in the mating of John and Joan. But the Short-story, being brief, does not need a love-interest to hold its parts together, and the writer of Short-stories has thus a greater freedom: he may do as he pleases; from him a love-tale is not expected.

But other things are required of a writer of Short-stories which are not required of a writer of Novels. The novelist may take his time: he has abundant room to turn about. The writer of Short-stories must be concise, and compression, a vigorous compression, is essential. For him, more than for any one else, the half is more than the whole. Again, the novelist may be commonplace, he may bend his best energies to the photographic reproduction of the actual; if he show us a cross section of real life we are content; but the writer of Short-stories must have originality and ingenuity. If to compression, originality, and ingenuity he add also a touch of fantasy, so much the better. It may be said that no one has ever succeeded as a writer of Short-stories who had not ingenuity, originality, and compression, and that most of those who have succeeded in this line had also the touch of fantasy. But there are

not a few successful novelists lacking not only in fantasy and compression, but also in ingenuity and originality: they had other qualities, no doubt, but these they had not. If an example must be given, the name of Anthony Trollope will occur to all. Fantasy was a thing he abhorred; compression he knew not; and originality and ingenuity can be conceded to him only by a strong stretch of the ordinary meaning of the words. Other qualities he had in plenty, but not these. And, not having them, he was not a writer of Short-stories. Judging from his essay on Hawthorne, one may even go so far as to say that Trollope did not know a good Short-story when he saw it.

I have written Short-story with a capital S and a hyphen because I wished to emphasize the distinction between the Short-story and the story which is merely short. The Short-story is a high and difficult department of fiction. The story which is short can be written by anybody who can write at all; and it may be good, bad, or indifferent; but at its best it is wholly unlike the Short-story. In 'An Editor's Tales' Trollope has given us excellent specimens of the story which is short; and the stories which make up this book are amusing enough and clever enough, but they

are wanting in the individuality and in the completeness of the genuine Short-story. Like the brief tales to be seen in the English monthly magazines and in the Sunday editions of American newspapers into which they are copied, they are, for the most part, either merely amplified anecdotes or else incidents which might have been used in a Novel just as well as not. Now, the genuine Short-story abhors the idea of the Novel. It can be conceived neither as part of a Novel nor as elaborated and expanded so as to form a Novel. A good Short-story is no more the synopsis of a Novel than it is an episode from a Novel. A slight Novel, or a Novel cut down, is a Novelette: it is not a Short-story. Mr. Howells's 'Their Wedding Journey' and Miss Howard's 'One Summer' are Novelettes,—little Novels. Mr. Anstey's 'Vice Versa,' Mr. Besant's 'Case of Mr. Lucraft,' Hugh Conway's 'Called Back,' Mr. Julian Hawthorne's 'Archibald Malmaison,' and Mr. Stevenson's 'Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' are Short-stories in conception, although they are without the compression which the Short-story requires. In the acute and learned essay on *vers de société* which Mr. Frederick Locker prefixed to his admirable 'Lyra Elegantiarum,' he declared that the two characteristics of the best *vers de*

société were brevity and brilliancy, and that the 'Rape of the Lock' would be the type and model of the best *vers de société*—if it were not just a little too long. So it is with the 'Case of Mr. Lucraft,' with 'Vice Versa,' with 'Archibald Malmaison': they are just a little too long.

It is to be noted as a curious coincidence that there is no exact word in English to designate either *vers de société* or the Short-story, and yet in no language are there better *vers de société* or Short-stories than in English. It may be remarked also that there is a certain likeness between *vers de société* and Short-stories: for one thing, both seem easy to write and are hard. And the typical qualifications of each may apply with almost equal force to the other: *vers de société* should reveal compression, ingenuity, and originality, and Short-stories should have brevity and brilliancy. In no class of writing are neatness of construction and polish of execution more needed than in the writing of *vers de société* and of Short-stories. The writer of Short-stories must have the sense of form, which Mr. Lathrop has called "the highest and last attribute of a creative writer." The construction must be logical, adequate, harmonious. Here is the weak spot in Mr. Bishop's 'One of the Thirty Pieces,'

the fundamental idea of which has extraordinary strength perhaps not fully developed in the story. But other of Mr. Bishop's stories — the 'Battle of Bunkerloo,' for instance — are admirable in all ways, conception and execution having an even excellence. Again, Hugh Conway's 'Daughter of the Stars' is a Short-story which fails from sheer deficiency of style: here is one of the very finest Short-story ideas ever given to mortal man, but the handling is at best barely sufficient. To do justice to the conception would task the execution of a poet. We can merely wonder what the tale would have been had it occurred to Hawthorne, to Poe, or to Théophile Gautier. An idea logically developed by one possessing the sense of form and the gift of style is what we look for in the Short-story.

But, although the sense of form and the gift of style are essential to the writing of a good Short-story, they are secondary to the idea, to the conception, to the subject. Those who hold, with a certain American novelist, that it is no matter what you have to say, but only how you say it, need not attempt the Short-story; for the Short-story, far more than the Novel even, demands a subject. The Short-story is nothing if there is no story to tell. The Novel, so Mr. James told us not long

ago, "is, in its broadest definition, a personal impression of life." The most powerful force in French fiction to-day is M. Emile Zola, chiefly known in America and England, I fear me greatly, by the dirt which masks and degrades the real beauty and firm strength not seldom concealed in his novels; and M. Emile Zola declares that the novelist of the future will not concern himself with the artistic evolution of a plot: he will take *une histoire quelconque*, any kind of a story, and make it serve his purpose,—which is to give elaborate pictures of life in all its most minute details. The acceptance of these theories is a negation of the Short-story. Important as are form and style, the subject of the Short-story is of more importance yet. What you have to tell is of greater interest than how you tell it. I once heard a clever American novelist pour sarcastic praise upon another American novelist,—for novelists, even American novelists, do not always dwell together in unity. The subject of the eulogy is the chief of those who have come to be known as the International Novelists, and he was praised because he had invented and made possible a fifth plot. Hitherto, declared the eulogist, only four terminations of a novel have been known to the most enthusiastic and untiring student of fiction.

First, they are married; or, second, she marries some one else; or, thirdly, he marries some one else; or, fourthly, and lastly, she dies. Now, continued the panegyrist, a fifth termination has been shown to be practicable: they are not married, she does not die, he does not die, and nothing happens at all. As a Short-story need not be a love-story, it is of no consequence at all whether they marry or die; but a Short-story in which nothing happens at all is an absolute impossibility.

Perhaps the difference between a Short-story and a Sketch can best be indicated by saying that, while a Sketch may be still-life, in a Short-story something always happens. A Sketch may be an outline of character, or even a picture of a mood of mind, but in a Short-story there must be something done, there must be an action. Yet the distinction, like that between the Novel and the Romance, is no longer of vital importance. In the preface to the 'House of the Seven Gables,' Hawthorne sets forth the difference between the Novel and the Romance, and claims for himself the privileges of the romancer. Mr. Henry James fails to see this difference. The fact is, that the Short-story and the Sketch, the Novel and the Romance, melt and merge one into the other, and no man

may mete the boundaries of each, though their extremes lie far apart. With the more complete understanding of the principle of development and evolution in literary art, as in physical nature, we see the futility of a strict and rigid classification into precisely defined genera and species. All that is needful for us to remark now is that the Short-story has limitless possibilities: it may be as realistic as the most prosaic novel, or as fantastic as the most ethereal romance.

As a touch of fantasy, however slight, is a welcome ingredient in a Short-story, and as the American takes more thought of things unseen than the Englishman, we may have here an incomplete explanation of the superiority of the American Short-story over the English. "John Bull has suffered the idea of the Invisible to be very much fattened out of him," says Mr. Lowell: "Jonathan is conscious still that he lives in the World of the Unseen as well as of the Seen." It is not enough to catch a ghost white-handed and to hale him into the full glare of the electric light. A brutal misuse of the supernatural is perhaps the very lowest degradation of the art of fiction. But "to mingle the marvellous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor than as any actual portion of the substance," to quote from the preface to

the 'House of the Seven Gables,' this is, or should be, the aim of the writer of Short-stories whenever his feet leave the firm ground of fact as he strays in the unsubstantial realms of fantasy. In no one's writings is this better exemplified than in Hawthorne's; not even in Poe's. There is a propriety in Hawthorne's fantasy to which Poe could not attain. Hawthorne's effects are moral where Poe's are merely physical. The situation and its logical development and the effects to be got out of it are all Poe thinks of. In Hawthorne the situation, however strange and weird, is only the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual struggle. Ethical consequences are always worrying Hawthorne's soul: but Poe did not know that there were any ethics.

There are literary evolutionists who, in their whim of seeing in every original writer a copy of some predecessor, have declared that Hawthorne is derived from Tieck, and Poe from Hoffmann, just as Dickens modelled himself on Smollett and Thackeray followed in the footsteps of Fielding. In all four cases the pupil surpassed the master,—if haply Tieck and Hoffmann can be considered as even remotely the masters of Hawthorne and Poe. When Coleridge was told that Klopstock was the German Milton, he assented with the dry

addendum, "A very German Milton." So is Hoffmann a very German Poe, and Tieck a very German Hawthorne. Of a truth, both Poe and Hawthorne are as American as any one can be. If the adjective American has any meaning at all, it qualifies Poe and Hawthorne. They were American to the core. They both revealed the curious sympathy with Oriental moods of thought which is often an American characteristic. Poe, with his cold logic and his mathematical analysis, and Hawthorne, with his introspective conscience and his love of the subtile and the invisible, are representative of phases of American character not to be mistaken by any one who has given thought to the influence of nationality.

As to which of the two was the greater, discussion is idle, but that Hawthorne was the finer genius few would deny. Poe, as cunning an artificer of goldsmith's work, and as adroit in its vending as was ever M. Josse, declared that "Hawthorne's distinctive trait is invention, creation, imagination, originality,—a trait which in the literature of fiction is positively worth all the rest." But with the moral basis of Hawthorne's work, which had flowered in the crevices and crannies of New England Puritanism, Poe did not concern himself. In Poe's hands the story of the

'Ambitious Guest' might have thrilled us with a more powerful horror, but it would have lacked the ethical beauty which Hawthorne gave it and which makes it significant beyond a mere feat of verbal legerdemain. And the subtile simplicity of the 'Great Stone Face' is as far from Poe as the pathetic irony of the 'Ambitious Guest.' In all his most daring fantasies Hawthorne is natural, and, though he may project his vision far beyond the boundaries of fact, nowhere does he violate the laws of nature. He had at all times a wholesome simplicity, and he never showed any trace of the morbid taint which characterizes nearly all Poe's work. Hawthorne, one may venture to say, had the broad sanity of genius, while we should understand any one who might declare that Poe had mental disease raised to the n^{th}.

Although it may be doubted whether the fiery and tumultuous rush of a volcano, which may be taken to typify Poe, is as powerful or impressive in the end as the calm and inevitable progression of a glacier, to which, for the purposes of this comparison only, we may liken Hawthorne, yet the effect and influence of Poe's work are indisputable. One might hazard the assertion that in all Latin countries he is the best known of American authors. Certainly no American writer has

been as widely accepted in France. Nothing better of its kind has ever been done than the 'Pit and the Pendulum,' or than the 'Fall of the House of Usher,' which Mr. Stoddard has compared recently with Browning's 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came' for its power of suggesting intellectual desolation. Nothing better of its kind has ever been done than the 'Gold Bug,' or than the 'Purloined Letter,' or than the 'Murders in the Rue Morgue.' This last, indeed, is a story of marvellous skill: it was the first of its kind, and to this day it remains a model, not only unsurpassed, but unapproachable. It was the first of detective stories; and it has had thousands of imitations and no rival. The originality, the ingenuity, the verisimilitude of this tale and of its fellows are beyond all praise. Poe had a faculty which one may call imaginative ratiocination to a degree beyond all other writers of fiction. He did not at all times keep up to the high level, in one style, of the 'Fall of the House of Usher,' and in another of the 'Murders in the Rue Morgue,' and it was not to be expected that he should. Only too often did he sink to the grade of the ordinary 'Tale from *Blackwood*,' which he himself satirized in his usual savage vein of humor. Yet even in his flimsiest and most tawdry tales we see the

truth of Mr. Lowell's assertion that Poe had "two of the prime qualities of genius,—a faculty of vigorous yet minute analysis, and a wonderful fecundity of imagination." Mr. Lowell said also that Poe combined "in a very remarkable manner two faculties which are seldom found united,—a power of influencing the mind of the reader by the impalpable shadows of mystery and a minuteness of detail which does not leave a pin or a button unnoticed. Both are, in truth, the natural results of the predominating quality of his mind, to which we have before alluded,—analysis." In Poe's hands, however, the enumeration of pins and buttons, the exact imitation of the prosaic facts of humdrum life in this workaday world, is not an end, but a means only, whereby he constructs and intensifies the shadow of mystery which broods over the things thus realistically portrayed.

With the recollection that it is more than half a century since Hawthorne and Poe wrote their best Short-stories, it is not a little comic to see now and again in American newspapers a rash assertion that "American literature has hitherto been deficient in good Short-stories," or the reckless declaration that "the art of writing Short-stories has not hitherto been cultivated in the United

States." Nothing could be more inexact than these statements. Almost as soon as America began to have any literature at all it had good Short-stories. It is quite within ten, or at the most twenty, years that the American novel has come to the front and forced the acknowledgment of its equality with the English novel and the French novel; but for fifty years the American Short-story has had a supremacy which any competent critic could not but acknowledge. Indeed, the present excellence of the American novel is due in great measure to the Short-story; for nearly every one of the American novelists whose works are now read by the whole English-speaking race began as a writer of Short-stories. Although as a form of fiction the Short-story is not inferior to the Novel, and although it is not easier, all things considered, yet its brevity makes its composition simpler for the 'prentice hand. Though the Short-stories of the beginner may not be good, yet in the writing of Short-stories he shall learn how to tell a story, he shall discover by experience the elements of the art of fiction more readily and, above all, more quickly than if he had begun on a long and exhausting novel. The physical strain of writing a full-sized novel is far greater than the reader can well imagine. To this

strain the beginner in fiction may gradually accustom himself by the composition of Short-stories.

(Here, if the digression may be pardoned, occasion serves to say that if our writers of plays had the same chance that our writers of novels have, we might now have a school of American dramatists of which we should be as proud as of our school of American novelists. In dramatic composition, the equivalent of the Short-story is the one-act play, be it drama or comedy or comedietta or farce. As the novelists have learned their trade by the writing of Short-stories, so the dramatists might learn their trade, far more difficult as it is and more complicated, by the writing of one-act plays. But, while the magazines of the United States are hungry for good Short-stories, and sift carefully all that are sent to them, in the hope of happening on a treasure, the theatres of the United States are closed to one-act plays, and the dramatist is denied the opportunity of making a humble and tentative beginning. The conditions of the theatre are such that there is little hope of a change for the better in this respect,—more's the pity. The manager has a tradition that a "broken bill," a programme containing more than one play, is a confession of weakness, and he prefers, so far as possible, to keep his weakness concealed.)

When we read the roll of American novelists, we see that nearly all of them began as writers of Short-stories. Some of them, Mr. Bret Harte, for instance, and Mr. Edward Everett Hale, never got any farther, or, at least, if they wrote novels, their novels did not receive the full artistic appreciation and popular approval bestowed on their Short-stories. Even Mr. Cable's 'Grandissimes' has not made his readers forget his 'Posson Jone,' nor has Mr. Aldrich's 'Queen of Sheba,' charming as she was, driven from our memory his 'Marjory Daw,' as delightful and as captivating as that other non-existent heroine, Mr. Austin Dobson's 'Dorothy.' Mrs. Burnett, Miss Woolson, and Miss Murfree put forth volumes of Short-stories before they attempted the more sustained flight of the full-fledged Novel. Miss Jewett, Mr. Bunner, Mr. Bishop, and Mr. Julian Hawthorne wrote Short-stories before they wrote novels; and Mr. James has never gathered into a book from the back-numbers of magazines the half of his earlier efforts.

In these references to the American magazine I believe I have suggested the real reason of the superiority of the American Short-stories over the English. It is not only that the eye of patriotism may detect more fantasy, more humor, a finer

feeling for art, in these younger United States, but there is a more emphatic and material reason for the American proficiency. There is in the United States a demand for Short-stories which does not exist in Great Britain, or at any rate not in the same degree. The Short-story is of very great importance to the American magazine. But in the British magazine the serial Novel is the one thing of consequence, and all else is termed "padding." In England the writer of three-volume Novels is the best paid of literary laborers. So in England whoever has the gift of story-telling is strongly tempted not to essay the difficult art of writing Short-stories, for which he will receive only an inadequate reward; and he is as strongly tempted to write a long story which may serve first as a serial and afterward as a three-volume Novel. The result of this temptation is seen in the fact that there is not a single English novelist whose reputation has been materially assisted by the Short-stories he has written. More than once in the United States a single Short-story has made a man known, but in Great Britain such an event is well-nigh impossible. The disastrous effect on narrative art of the desire to distend every subject to the three-volume limit has been dwelt on unceasingly by English critics.

The three-volume system is peculiar to Great Britain: it does not obtain either in France or the United States. As a consequence, the French and American writer of fiction is left free to treat his subject at the length it demands,—no more and no less. It is pleasant to note that there are signs of the beginning of the break-up of the system even in England; and the protests of the chief English critics against it are loud and frequent. It is responsible in great measure for the invention and protection of the British machine for making English Novels, of which Mr. Warner told us in his entertaining essay on fiction. We all know the work of this machine, and we all recognize the trade-mark it imprints in the corner. But Mr. Warner failed to tell us, what nevertheless is a fact, that this British machine can be geared down so as to turn out the English short story. Now, the English short story, as the machine makes it and as we see it in most English magazines, is only a little English Novel, or an incident or episode from an English Novel. It is thus the exact artistic opposite of the American Short-story, of which, as we have seen, the chief characteristics are originality, ingenuity, compression, and, not infrequently, a touch of fantasy. I do not say, of course, that the good and genuine Short-story is

not written in England now and then,—for if I were to make any such assertion some of the best work of Mr. Stevenson, of Mr. Besant, and of Mr. Anstey would rise up to contradict me; but this is merely an accidental growth, and not a staple of production. As a rule, in England the artist in fiction does not care to hide his light under a bushel, and he puts his best work where it will be seen of all men,—that is to say, *not* in a Short-story. So it happens that the most of the brief tales in the English magazines are not true Short-stories at all, and that they belong to a lower form of the art of fiction, in the department with the amplified anecdote. It is the three-volume Novel which has killed the Short-story in England.

Certain of the remarks in the present paper I put forth first anonymously in the columns of the *Saturday Review*. To my intense surprise, they were controverted in the *Nation*. The critic began by assuming that the writer had said that Americans preferred Short-stories to Novels. What had really been said was that there was a steady demand for Short-stories in American magazines, whereas in England the demand was rather for serial Novels. "In the first place," said the critic, "Americans do not prefer Short-stories, as is shown by the enormous number of British

Novels circulated among us; and in the second place, tales of the quiet, domestic kind, which form the staple of periodicals like *All the Year Round* and *Chambers's Journal*, have here thousands of readers where native productions, however clever and original, have only hundreds, since the former are reprinted by the country papers and in the Sunday editions of city papers as rapidly and regularly as they are produced at home." Now, the answer to this is simply that these English Novels and English stories are reprinted widely in the United States, not because the American people prefer them to anything else, but because, owing to the absence of international copyright, they cost nothing. That the American people prefer to read American stories when they can get them is shown by the enormous circulation of the periodicals which make a specialty of American fiction.

I find I have left myself little space to speak of the Short-story as it exists in other literatures than those of Great Britain and the United States. The conditions which have killed the Short-story in England do not obtain elsewhere; and elsewhere there are not a few good writers of Short-stories. Turgenef, Björnsen, Sacher-Masoch, Freytag, Lindau, are the names which one recalls

at once and without effort as masters in the art and mystery of the Short-story. Turgenef's Short-stories, in particular, it would be difficult to commend too warmly. But it is in France that the Short-story flourishes most abundantly. In France the conditions are not unlike those in the United States; and, although there are few French magazines, there are many Parisian newspapers of a wide hospitality to literature. The demand for the Short-story has called forth an abundant supply. Among the writers of the last generation who excelled in the *conte*—which is almost the exact French equivalent for Short-story, as *nouvelle* may be taken to indicate the story which is merely short, the episode, the incident, the amplified anecdote—were Alfred de Musset, Théophile Gautier, and Prosper Mérimée. The best work of Mérimée has never been surpassed. As compression was with him almost a mania, as, indeed, it was with his friend Turgenef, he seemed born on purpose to write Short-stories. Turgenef carried his desire for conciseness so far that he seems always to be experimenting to see how much of his story he may leave out. One of the foremost writers of *contes* is Edmond About, whose exquisite humor is known to all readers of the 'Man with the Broken Ear,'—a Short-story in conception,

though unduly extended in execution. Few of the charming *contes* of M. Alphonse Daudet, or of the earlier Short-stories of M. Émile Zola, have been translated into English ; and the poetic tales of M. François Coppée are likewise unwisely neglected in this country. The 'Abbé Constantin' of M. Ludovic Halévy has been read by many, but the Gallic satire of his more Parisian Short-stories has been passed over, perhaps wisely, in spite of their broad humor and their sharp wit. In the very singular collection of stories which M. Jean Richepin has called the 'Morts Bizarres' we find a modern continuation of the Poe tradition, always more potent in France than elsewhere.

(Here I cancel a casual sentence written in 1885, before Guy de Maupassant had completely revealed his extraordinary gifts and his marvellous craftsmanship. His Short-stories are masterpieces of the art of story-telling, because he had a Greek sense of form, a Latin power of construction, and a French felicity of style. They are simple, most of them ; direct, swift, inevitable, and inexorable in their straightforward movement. If art consists in the suppression of non-essentials, there have been few greater artists in fiction than Maupassant. In his Short-stories there is never a word wasted, and there is never an excursus. Nor is there any feebleness or fumbling. What he wanted to do

he did, with the unerring certainty of Leather-stocking, hitting the bull's-eye again and again. He had the abundance and the ease of the very great artists ; and the half-dozen or the half-score of his best stories are among the very best Short-stories in any language.

In his later tales there is to be noted a tendency toward the psychology of the morbid. The thought of death and the dread of mental disease seemed to possess him. In 'Le Horla,' for example, we find Maupassant taking for his own Fitz-james O'Brien's uncanny monster, invisible and yet tangible ; and the Frenchman gave the tale an added touch of terror by making the unfortunate victim discover that the creature he feared had a stronger will than his own, and that he was being hypnotized to his doom by a being whom he could not see, but whose presence he could feel.)

The Short-story should not be void or without form, but its form may be whatever the author please. He has an absolute liberty of choice. It may be a personal narrative, like Poe's 'Descent into the Maelstrom' or Mr. Hale's 'My Double, and How He Undid Me'; it may be impersonal, like Mr. Frederick B. Perkins's 'Devil-Puzzlers' or Colonel J. W. De Forest's 'Brigade Commander'; it may be a conundrum, like Mr. Stockton's insoluble query, the 'Lady or the Tiger?' it may be

'A Bundle of Letters,' like Mr. Henry James's story, or 'A Letter and a Paragraph,' like Mr. Bunner's; it may be a medley of letters and telegrams and narrative, like Mr. Aldrich's 'Margery Daw'; it may be cast in any one of these forms, or in a combination of all of them, or in a wholly new form, if haply such may yet be found by diligent search. Whatever its form, it should have symmetry of design. If it have also wit or humor, pathos or poetry, and especially a distinct and unmistakable flavor of individuality, so much the better. But the chief requisites are compression, originality, ingenuity, with now and again a touch of fantasy. Sometimes we may detect in a writer of Short-stories a tendency toward the over-elaboration of ingenuity, toward the exhibition of ingenuity for its own sake, as in a Chinese puzzle. But mere cleverness is incompatible with greatness, and to commend a writer as "very clever" is not to give him high praise. From this fault of supersubtlety, women are free for the most part. They are more likely than men to rely on broad human emotion, and their tendency in error is toward the morbid analysis of a high-strung moral situation.

The more carefully we study the history of fiction the more clearly we perceive that the Novel and the Short-story are essentially different — that

the difference between them is not one of mere length only, but fundamental. The Short-story seeks one set of effects in its own way, and the Novel seeks a wholly distinct set of effects in a wholly distinct way. We are led also to the conclusion that the Short-story — in spite of the fact that in our language it has no name of its own — is one of the few sharply defined literary forms. It is a *genre*, as M. Brunetière terms it, a species, as a naturalist might call it, as individual as the Lyric itself and as various. It is as distinct an entity as the Epic, as Tragedy, as Comedy. Now the Novel is not a form of the same sharply defined individuality ; it is — or at least it may be — anything. It is the child of the Epic and the heir of the Drama ; but it is a hybrid. And one of the foremost of living American novelists, who happens also to be one of the most acute and sympathetic of American critics, has told me that he was often distracted by the knowledge of this fact even while he was writing a novel.

In the history of literature the Short-story was developed long before the Novel, which indeed is but a creature of yesterday. The Short-story also seems much easier of accomplishment than the Novel, if only because it is briefer. And yet the list of the masters of the Short-story is far less

crowded than the list of the masters of the longer form. There are a dozen or more very great novelists recorded in the history of fiction ; but there are scarcely more than half a dozen Short-story writers. From Chaucer and Boccaccio we pass to Hawthorne and Poe almost without finding another name that insists upon enrolment. A little later we light upon Mérimée and Turgenef, whose title to be recorded there is none to dispute. Now at the end of the nineteenth century we find two more that no competent critic would dare to omit — Guy de Maupassant and Rudyard Kipling.

(1885–1900)

P. S. So far as the author is aware, he had no predecessor in asserting that the Short-story differs from the Novel essentially, and not merely in matter of length. So far as he knows, it was in the present paper the suggestion was first made that the Short-story is in reality a *genre*, a separate kind, a genus by itself. But although this distinction may not have been made explicitly by any earlier critic, there is little doubt that Poe felt it, even if he did not formulate it in set terms. It seems to be implicit in more than one of his critical essays, more particularly in that on Hawthorne's tales. And it is from this essay that the following quotations are taken:

"The ordinary novel is objectionable from its length, for reasons already stated in substance. As it cannot be read at one sitting, it deprives itself, of course, of the immense force derivable from *totality*. Worldly interests intervening during the pauses of perusal modify, annul, or contract, in a greater or less degree, the impressions of the book. But simply cessation in reading would, of itself, be sufficient to destroy the true unity. In the brief tale, however, the author is enabled to carry out the fullness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control. There are no external or extrinsic influences — resulting from weariness or interruption.

"A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents, he then combines such events, as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one preëstablished design. As by such means, with such care and skill, a

picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed ; and this is an end unattainable by the novel. Undue brevity is just as exceptionable here as in the poem ; but undue length is yet more to be avoided."

In one of his 'Vailima Letters' Stevenson declares his adherence to what Poe called the principle of "totality":

"Make another end to it? Ah, yes, but that's not the way I write; the whole tale is implied ; I never use an effect when I can help it, unless it prepares the effects that are to follow ; that's what a story consists in. To make another end, that is to make the beginning all wrong. The dénouement of a long story is nothing; it is just 'a full close,' which you may approach and accompany as you please — it is a coda, not an essential member in the rhythm; but the body and end of a short story is bone of the bone and blood of the blood of the beginning." ('Vailima Letters,' vol. i., p. 147.)

V

A NOTE ON THE ESSAY

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OWADAYS fiction may seem to some of us the most many-sided department of literature, for it is no longer content to tell a story only; it insists at least in pointing a moral, even when it does not undertake also to give instruction in history and in theology. But I doubt if the Novel is really as protean as the Essay. Mr. Owen Wister is not further removed from Mrs. Humphry Ward, Mark Twain is not more widely separated from George Sand, than Thoreau is from Charles Lamb, or Dr. Johnson from Montaigne. It would be difficult, indeed, to frame a definition wide enough to include the essays of Bacon and Emerson, of Steele and Goldsmith and Irving, of Hazlitt and Bagehot and Lowell, of Stevenson and Mr. Howells. The dictionary declares that an Essay is "a discursive composition concerned with a particular subject, usually shorter and less methodical and finished than a treatise." Few things in literature are more methodical and finished than

most of Macaulay's essays, and few things are less discursive than most of Matthew Arnold's essays, wherein a skeleton of logical structure is always to be laid bare not far below the surface.

One lexicographer quotes from Bacon his assertion that he chose "to write certain brief notes, set down rather significantly than curiously, which I have called essays," following this with the explanation that "the word is late, but the thing is ancient." How ancient it is we can see for ourselves when we find another writer seeking its origin in the "dispersed meditations" of Seneca's 'Epistles to Lucilius,' and when we reflect that if the germ of the Essay is to be sought in any collection of "dispersed meditations," it can surely be found in the Proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, King of Israel — to know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice and judgment, and equity; to give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

So abiding is the influence of Montaigne that a certain doubtful suggestion of desultoriness still attaches itself to the Essay, as though it were fit reading only for the days when, in Thoreau's phrase, idleness is "the most attractive and productive industry." A content so modest as this

tends to unfit it for the adequate description of writing as strenuous as Carlyle's or as whimsically elaborated as Lamb's, however accurately it may apply to the playful pleasantry of Steele and Irving, for instance. It is hard to draw the line between the Essay on the one side and the Treatise or Disquisition or Thesis on the other. It is not hard, however, to discover in the Essay itself at least two broad divisions, in one of which we find the names of Montaigne, Bacon, and Emerson, while in the other we have Steele and Addison, Oliver Goldsmith, and Washington Irving. This second group it is that we have in mind when we talk of the English essayists, and yet it is the first group that has the securer title, or at least the earlier.

Wherever Montaigne may have got the hint, whether from Plutarch or from Cicero's Letters or from Seneca, he devised a new literary form, which Bacon borrowed from him, and which Emerson in turn claimed as his own also. These are the three great masters of the wandering and shapeless medley of thoughts more or less relating to a single topic. The charm in their essays is not in any artful arrangement; it is in the pithy sayings partly, and partly in the writers' self-revelation. They were all three of them kindly and frank, tolerant and shrewd, keen-eyed and quick-

witted. Montaigne was more a man of the world, Bacon more a man of affairs, and Emerson more a man of the library.

Steele, aided by Addison, took the Essay where Montaigne and Bacon had left it, and gave it an unexpected development, influenced perhaps by Walton and perhaps by La Bruyère. The eighteenth-century Essay, as we have it in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* and in all the cloud of their copyists, seems to me sometimes almost as though it were a definite literary form, as distinct as the Short-story or the Elegy. It has in prose the characteristics which we ask in rhyme from *vers de société* — the "familiar verse" of Cowper. Like that, it is brief and brilliant and buoyant; it has ease and elegance; it only hints its pathos, and it never insists on its wit; it reveals the gentleman and the scholar, and yet it recalls always the man about town.

In the most of the successes of Steele and Addison the effort of imitation is obvious; a copy has been set which they are trying to follow, often awkwardly and sometimes even clumsily. Dr. Johnson's grace is but elephantine when he tries to dance in these fetters; and even Dr. Johnson's foe, Lord Chesterfield, clever as he was, failed to hit the mark, giving to the Essay a metallic hardness

and a cynical brilliance not quite in keeping. But Goldsmith was perfectly at ease, and he handled the form as naturally as though he had invented it for his own use. With all his individuality in life, Oliver Goldsmith was in literature of the lineage of Richard Steele, and so also was Washington Irving. It was in the shop Goldsmith had inherited from Steele that Irving served his apprenticeship; but he soon set up for himself; and in its delicacy and its grace and its ease, Irving's best work is quite worthy of comparison with the masterpieces of the elder brothers of the craft.

Slight and airy as the Essay was in the hands of Steele and Addison, the service it rendered in the development of the art of character-drawing cannot easily be overestimated. If Steele and Addison descended from Montaigne on one side, on the other they were the heirs of Cervantes also. Sir Roger de Coverley is the great-grandnephew of the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance. This fertile Cervantine tradition they transmitted to those who came after them. The richly colored portrait of the Tory Foxhunter had been hung in Addison's studio years before Fielding painted the robustious Squire Western. Ned Softly the Poet had exhibited his pleasant pedantry in the

pages of the *Tatler* years before Jane Austen had etched the imperturbable Mr. Collins. The 'Fine Lady's Journal' had been printed in the *Spectator* years before Miss Edgeworth drew the character of the flighty Mrs. Delacour.

And here, if a discursive inquiry be not debarred, occasion serves to put a puzzling question. When the Essay is at its best, it has the spontaneity, the unstudied charm, the pleasantly personal flavor of a good letter. Now, it is notorious that women have ever been the most artistic, as they are the most abundant, of letter-writers. Nowadays at least women are the only masters of the art of epistolary correspondence, since men no longer take pen in hand to gossip leisurely with a distant friend. Men dictate to a type-writer when they are not content to condense their communication into a peremptory telegram. Women also are more interested than men in the minor points of manners and of morals, which are of the essence of the Essay; and in detecting these as well as in dissecting them their eyes are sharper. Yet there is no woman's name inscribed high upon the roll of the essayists. The fact is indisputable, whatever the reason for it. Woman never gave her mind to the Essay, and so she has left no mark upon it. She waited rather until the modern Novel had been invented, and in that she seems

to have found the best medium for her self-expression.

Not only fiction was aided in its development by the labors of Steele and Addison and of their allies, but formal criticism also and more than one other branch of literature now flourishing abundantly in our magazines. The eighteenth-century Essay was not monotonous; indeed, it was very varied in its attack. From the *Spectator* alone one could pick out a typical character-sketch, a typical Short-story, a typical humorous skit, a typical Essay in criticism, a typical theatrical review, and even a typical obituary notice.

Mr. Henry James's brief memorial of the late George du Maurier might have had for its unconscious model Steele's 'Dick Estcourt: In Memoriam'; alike in method, the two papers are alike also in the warmth of affectionate regret that prompted them. Mr. Howells's recent 'East Side Ramble' may be matched by Steele's 'Day's Ramble in London'; and in both Essays can be seen a kindred keenness of observation, a kindred interest in the little things of which life is made up, and a kindred kindliness of spirit in the observer who is making the record. Mr. Frank R. Stockton's 'Casting Away of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine' (or any other of his marvellously matter-of-fact impossibilities) is compounded ac-

cording to a recipe very like that which served Addison when he wrote out the details of the traveller's tale of the 'Frozen Voices.' The simple pathos of the two papers in which Mr. Bickerstaff visits a friend, and the homely touches of human nature that make the people real to us and alive — these are qualities we can duplicate in many an American Short-story and character-sketch — in Mr. Page's 'Marse Chan' and 'Meh Lady,' for example; in Miss Wilkins's 'Revolt of Mother,' in Mr. Garland's 'Return of the Private.' So also we cannot but see that it was Addison's rather labored and rather empty papers on 'Paradise Lost' that helped to make it possible for Macaulay afterward to write his trenchant criticism of Milton.

Perhaps it is this very versatility of the Essay as we find it in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* that has misled some of us into thinking that the form is not as popular to-day as it was once. The Essay, as it was then, has now differentiated itself into the Short-story and into criticism, neither of which is remembered to have had any connection with it; and the name has been narrowed again to indicate chiefly the paper of "dispersed meditations." It may be said of the Essay that the stream flows nowadays with a fuller current than ever before, but as it has worn several new mouths

for itself, no one of them has the prominence or the importance of the old single channel. Yet, even when we take the word in its most reduced meaning, the Essay has not lacked masters in the last half of the nineteenth century—Thoreau and Lowell and Stevenson.

(1897)

VI

TWO LATTER-DAY LYRISTS

TWO LATTER-DAY LYRISTS.

I.

Mr. Frederick Locker.

ATRICIAN rhymes" is the apt phrase Mr. Stedman coined to characterize that kind of *vers de société*, nameless in English, which is more than mere society-verse. It describes Mr. Locker's poetry more accurately than Mr. Austin Dobson's, for example, or Mr. Calverley's, since Mr. Locker confines himself more strictly within the circle of "good society," of Park Lane, and of fashion. Mr. Locker is the du Maurier of song, and his 'London Lyrics' are as entertaining and as instructive to the student of Victorian manners as Mr. du Maurier's 'Pictures of English Society.' Mr. Locker has succeeded Praed as the laureate of the world, and he ignores the flesh, and is ignorant of the devil, just like Praed, and just like society itself. But it seems to me that Mr. Locker's range is wider than Praed's, whose success lay

almost altogether in his songs of society; Praed was out of place when he ventured far from Mayfair and beyond the sound of St. George's in Hanover Square; while Mr. Locker's Pegasus pauses at the mouth of Cité Fadette as gracefully as it treads the gravel of Rotten Row. The later poet has wider sympathies than the elder, who, indeed, may be said to have had but one note. The 'Vicar' is a beautiful bit of verse, but its touch of tenderness sets it apart from all Praed's other work, which is brilliant with a hard and metallic brilliancy. Praed dazzles almost to weariness; his lines stand out sharply like fireworks at midnight. More brilliant than Praed no poet could well be. More pleasing Mr. Locker is, and he gives a higher pleasure. He has wit like Praed, but far more humor; and the soft radiance of humor never tires the eye like the quick flashes of wit. With broader humor, he has a broader humanity and a finer individuality. In short, the difference between the two may be summed up in favor of the younger man, by saying that Mr. Locker can write Praedesque poems,—compare the 'Belle of the Ball-room,' for instance, and 'A *Nice* Correspondent,'— while it may well be doubted whether Praed could have emulated Mr. Locker's 'To My Mistress' and 'At Her Window.'

Of course, it is easy to say that Mr. Locker continues the tradition of Prior and Praed; it is easy also to see that, in two respects, at least, the progression shows the progress of the age. One improvement is in the form used by the poet; the other in the feeling, the temper of the poet himself. Praed contented himself with putting his best work into the eight-line stanza, now a little worn from overwork:

> Our love was like most other loves;
> A little glow, a little shiver,
> A rosebud and a pair of gloves,
> And 'Fly not yet'—upon the river;
> Some jealousy of some one's heir,
> Some hopes of dying broken-hearted,
> A miniature, a lock of hair,
> The usual vows—and then we parted.

In this metre, Mr. Locker and Mr. Austin Dobson, in England, and Mr. Saxe, in America, have written verses that Praed might not disown; but though the metal was theirs, the mould was Praed's. Mr. Locker's best work has not gone into any one form; he has wisely varied his metre; he has invented of his own, and he has borrowed from his neighbor. 'A *Nice* Correspondent' is Swinburnian in its rhythm, and

'To My Grandmother' repeats the measures of Holmes's 'Last Leaf,' a delightful and most difficult metre, lending itself easily to intricate harmonies, and not to be attempted now by meaner hands:

> This Relative of mine,
> Was she seventy-and-nine
> When she died?
> By the canvas may be seen
> How she looked at seventeen,
> As a Bride.
>
> Beneath a summer tree
> Her maiden reverie
> Has a charm:
> Her ringlets are in taste;
> What an arm! . . . what a waist
> For an arm!

Is not this the perfection of daintiness and delicacy? Is it not delightful—this mingling of sly fun and playful banter? And this brings us to the second quality, in which Mr. Locker and Mr. Dobson are plainly superior to Prior and Praed—in their treatment of woman. Prior thought of women with little feeling, and he wrote of them with little respect; however much he might pretend to worship a dame or a damsel, he kept a

keen and unkind eye on her failings. At all times his tone toward women is one of good-natured contempt, often ill-concealed. With Praed, a complete change had come in the attitude; he is avowedly a friendly critic, and yet his verse catches no tinge of warmth from his friendliness. Though he may have felt deeply, he lets his scepticism and his wit hide his feeling until we are well-nigh forced to doubt whether he had any feeling to hide. The lively beauties who figure in Praed's glittering verse are far more true to life than the French fictions of Prior, but the ladies of Mr. Locker and Mr. Dobson are quite as charming and indubitably more natural. They are true women, too, not mere figments of the fancy; they are the result of later and deeper observation; and they have far more variety from the given prototype. Prior wrote of women at large, and Praed rang the changes on the 'Belle of the Ball-room.' Now, Mr. Locker has a gallery of girls, all fresh and ingenuous young maidens. Prior did not respect women; Praed admired them coldly; Mr. Locker has a warm regard for them and a manly respect, and also a demure humor which sees into their wiles and their weaknesses quite as sharply as did Prior or Praed.

Having set forth thus some of the things which

Mr. Locker, the poet, is and is not, it may be well to give a few facts about Mr. Locker, the man. He was born in 1821. His father, Edward Hawke Locker, was in the public service, and took a warm interest in literature and art. His grandfather, Captain W. Locker, R. N., was an old friend of Lord Nelson's; and both Collingwood and Nelson served under him. Mr. Locker composed little until late in life, or at least until he was thirty; and he found great difficulty, so he wrote to a friend, "in persuading editors to have anything to say to my verses; but Thackeray believed in me, and used to say, 'Never mind, Locker, our verse *may* be small beer, but at any rate it is the right tap.'" Thus encouraged, Mr. Locker wrote on, and in time editors began to relent. In 1857 he gathered his scattered poems and put them forth in a single volume as 'London Lyrics.' As edition followed edition he has added the few poems he has written of late years, and has dropped those of his earlier poems that he thought unworthy. The latest published edition—the eighth, I think it is—is scarcely any heavier than the first. Later than this, however, is a little book, beautifully printed and beautifully bound, which Mr. Locker has recently given to his friends, and which contains a special selection of his very best work,

made by Mr. Austin Dobson, who has prefixed this friendly little sextain :

> Apollo made, one April day,
> A new thing in the rhyming way;
> Its turn was neat, its wit was clear,
> It wavered 'twixt a smile and tear;
> Then Momus gave a touch satiric,
> And it became a 'London Lyric.'

Besides putting his own *vers de société* into a book, Mr. Locker made a collection, under the title of 'Lyra Elegantiarum,' of the best specimens in English of the *vers de société* and *vers d'occasion* of poets no longer living. Of this a new and revised edition was published in 1867; it is a model of what such a selection should be ; and it was ushered in by an essay of the editor's—all too brief—on the art of writing *vers de société*. In 1879 Mr. Locker published a most amusing little volume of 'Patchwork,' containing bits of rhyme and bits of talk, with here a jest and there a joke, excerpts from his commonplace book, and enlivened with a few of the anecdotes he is wont to tell most effectively. For the lyrist of London is no recluse ; he is a man of the world, even more than he is a man of letters. In life as in literature he has both humor and good-humor. Although satiric by nature, he is thor-

oughly sympathetic and generous. Well-to-do in the world, he has been able to indulge his liking for the little things in art which make life worth living. His collections of china, of drawings, of engravings, are all excellent; and his literary curiosities, first editions of great books and precious autographs of great men, make a poor American wickedly envious. He is a connoisseur of the best type, never buying trash or bargain-hunting; knowing what he wants, and why he wants it, and what it is worth; and his treasures are freely opened to any literary brother who is seeking after truth.

In studying Mr. Locker's pictures of English society we cannot but feel that the poet has drawn his lines with the living model before him. It is in the distinctively London-town lyrics—in the 'Pilgrims of Pall Mall,' in 'Rotten Row,' in 'At Hurlingham,' in 'St. James' Street,' and in 'Piccadilly,'—

> Piccadilly! Shops, palaces, bustle, and breeze,
> The whirring of wheels and the murmur of trees,
> By night or by day, whether noisy or stilly,
> Whatever my mood is, I love Piccadilly.

—it is in these that Mr. Locker most shows the influence of Praed, which is decidedly less apparent in the less local poems,—in 'A Garden Lyric,' in

'On an Old Muff,' in 'Geraldine,' and in the sportive and brightsome lines on 'A Human Skull':

A human Skull, I bought it passing cheap;
No doubt 'twas dearer to its first employer!
I thought mortality did well to keep
Some mute memento of the Old Destroyer.

Time was, some may have prized its blooming skin;
Here lips were woo'd, perhaps, in transport tender;
Some may have chuck'd what was a dimpled chin,
And never had my doubt about its gender.

. . . . . .

It may have held (to shoot some random shots)
Thy brains, Eliza Fry! or Baron Byron's;
The wits of Nelly Gwynne or Doctor Watts—
Two quoted bards. Two philanthropic sirens.

But this, I trust, is clearly understood,
If man or woman, if adored or hated—
Whoever own'd this Skull was not so good
Nor quite so bad as many may have stated.

Besides the playful humor of these poems, two things especially are to be noted in them—individuality and directness of expression. Whatever influence you may think you see here of some other poet, Horace, or Béranger, or Gautier, or Thackeray,—and the variety of these names shows the poet's versatility,—you cannot doubt that these poems are of a truth Mr. Locker's own, stamped with his

seal, marked with his image and superscription. Here plainly is a man with a character of his own, looking at life through his own eyes, now laughing with hearty gayety, again smiling a sad smile:

> "*I still can laugh*" is still my boast,
> But mirth has sounded gayer;
> And which provokes my laughter most,
> The preacher or the player?
> Alack, I cannot laugh at what
> Once made us laugh so freely;
> For Nestroy and Grassot are not,
> And where is Mrs. Keeley?

Quite as noteworthy as the individuality of the poet is his studied clearness. There is never an inversion or an involution; the verse is as straightforward as prose, and as easy to be "understanded of the people." The rhythm flows freely; the rhymes are neat and novel, and never forced; and the manner never intrudes itself to the injury of the matter. But Mr. Locker is not like Théophile Gautier, that Benvenuto Cellini of verse, nor like the cunning artificers of Gautier's school—poets who polish a poor little idea until they can see themselves in it. That he is ever going over his work with the file any one can see who will compare the first stanzas of 'Geraldine and I,' and of 'A Garden Lyric'; but he never overweights his

verse with a gorgeous setting, from selfish delight in the skill of his workmanship. Indeed, Mr. Locker sometimes has carried his search for simplicity of statement almost too far. But so many poets nowadays are as hard to understand as a Greek chorus, that we ought to be thankful to one who takes pains to be clear, and direct, and unaffected.

Affectation, indeed, is always a stumbling-block in the path of the maker of *vers de société;* but in 'London Lyrics' there are no traces of any slip. The poems are as simple and honest as the verse is direct and clear. Nowhere is affectation more easy than in addressing childhood; and, with the exception of Victor Hugo and Longfellow, perhaps no poet of our day has written of children as often as Mr. Locker. He has made a 'Rhyme of One,' and 'Little Dinky,' a rhyme of less than one (she is twelve weeks old). He has written 'To Lina Oswald' (aged five years), and to 'Geraldine' (who is fifteen); and 'Gertrude's Necklace' belonged to a maiden not much older. And all these poems to the young reveal the subdued humor and the worldly wit we have seen in the others written for their elders and betters, their pastors and masters, and they have even more of delicate tenderness and of true sentiment tainted by no trace of sentimentality.

One of Mr. Locker's songs has a lyric grace and an evanescent sweetness, recalling Herrick or Suckling:

AT HER WINDOW.

Beating Heart! we come again
  Where my Love reposes;
This is Mabel's window-pane;
  These are Mabel's roses.

Is she nested? Does she kneel
  In the twilight stilly,
Lily-clad from throat to heel,
  She, my Virgin Lily?

Soon the wan, the wistful stars,
  Fading, will forsake her;
Elves of light, on beamy bars,
  Whisper then, and wake her.

Let this friendly pebble plead
  At the flowery grating;
If she hear me, will she heed?
  Mabel, I am waiting.

Mabel will be decked anon,
  Zoned in bride's apparel;
Happy zone! oh, hark to yon
  Passion-shaken carol.

Sing thy song, thou tranced thrush,
  Pipe thy best, thy clearest;
Hush, her lattice moves, O, hush—
  Dearest Mabel!—dearest.

Is not this a marvel of refinement and restraint? It is as purely a lyric as the song of the thrush itself. Especially in poems like this is it that Mr. Locker is wholly other than Praed, with whom people persist in linking him. He has at once a finer vein of poetry and a broader vein of humor. Perhaps, after all, humor is Mr. Locker's chief characteristic,—a gentle humor, always under control, and never boisterous or burly, yet frank and free and full of mischief,—the humor of a keen observer, who is at once a gentleman and a poet. What, for example, can be more comic in conception, or more clear-cut in execution, than this?—

A TERRIBLE INFANT.

I recollect a nurse call'd Ann,
Who carried me about the grass,
And one fine day a fine young man
Came up and kissed the pretty lass.
She did not make the least objection!
Thinks I—"*Aha!*
When I can talk I'll tell mamma!"
And that's my earliest recollection.

It is in this quality of humor mainly, and in the fact that his verse is more individual than impersonal, that Mr. Locker's gifts differ from those of Mr. Austin Dobson. There is no need to make

a comparison of Mr. Locker's work with Mr. Dobson's; and, at best, comparisons are futile. Criticism is nowadays the tenth muse, and I am sure that Mrs. Malaprop would say that comparisons do not become that young woman. Suffice it to state that Mr. Frederick Locker and Mr. Austin Dobson stand, each on his own ground, at the head of the poets who sing of English society as it is. Mr. Locker is the elder, and it was to him that Mr. Dobson dedicated his 'Proverbs in Porcelain,' in these lines:

> Is it to kindest friend I send
> This nosegay gathered new?
> Or is it more to critic sure,
> To singer clear and true?
> I know not which, indeed, nor need:
> All three I found — in you.

(1883)

TWO LATTER-DAY LYRISTS.

II.

Mr. Austin Dobson.

As Mr. Lang told us in his sympathetic paper on M. Théodore de Banville, some literary reputations are like the fairies in that they cannot cross running water. Others again, it seems to me, are rather like the misty genii of the Arabian Nights, which loom highest when seen from afar. Poe, for example, is more appreciated in England than at home; and Cooper is given a more lofty rank by French than by American critics. In much the same manner, we note, Carlyle gained the ear of an American audience when he was not listened to with attention in Great Britain; and the scattered verses of Praed were collected together for American admirers long before the appearance of an English edition. And so it is, I think, with Mr. Austin Dobson, whose position as a leader in one division of Eng-

lish poetry was recognized more immediately and more unhesitatingly in these United States than in his native Great Britain. To Mr. Dobson the young school of American writers of familiar verse — to use Cowper's admirable phrase — look up as to a master; and his poems are read and pondered and imitated by not a few of the more promising of our younger poets.

Mr. Austin Dobson was born at Plymouth, January 18, 1840. He comes of a family of civil engineers, and it was as an engineer that his grandfather, toward the end of the last century, went to France, where he settled, and married a French lady. Among the earliest recollections of Mr. Dobson's father was his arrival in Paris on one side of the Seine as the Russians arrived on the other. This must have been in 1814. But the French boy had long become an English man when the poet was born. At the age of eight or nine Austin Dobson was taken by his parents — so a biographer tells us — "to Holyhead, in the island of Anglesea; he was educated at Beaumaris, at Coventry, and finally at Strasburg, whence he returned, at the age of sixteen, with the intention of becoming a civil engineer." But in December, 1856, he accepted an appointment in the civil service, where he has remained ever since.

Thus he has been able to act on the advice of Coleridge, often urged again by Dr. Holmes, to the effect "that a literary man should have another calling." Dr. Holmes adds the sly suggestion that he should confine himself to it; and this is what—for nearly ten years—Mr. Dobson did. He dabbled a little in art, having, like Théophile Gautier, the early ambition of becoming a painter. He learned to draw a little on wood. He wrote a little, mostly in prose. In fact, there are only four poems in the first edition of 'Vignettes in Rhyme' which were written before 1868. It was in this year that *St. Paul's* magazine was started by Anthony Trollope, an editor at once sympathetic and severe; he appreciated good work, and was unsparing in the kindly criticism which might make it better. In *St. Paul's*, therefore, between March, 1868, and March, 1874, appeared nearly twoscore of Mr. Dobson's pieces, including some of his very best: 'Tu Quoque,' 'A Dialogue from Plato,' 'Une Marquise,' 'An Autumn Idyll,' 'Dorothy,' 'A Gentleman of the Old School,' 'Avice,'—with its hazardous, bird-like effect, French in a way and in exquisite taste,—and the subtle and pathetic 'Drama of the Doctor's Window.' In October, 1873, there was published the first edition of

'Vignettes in Rhyme,' and the poet received for the first time that general recognition which denies itself to the writer of verses scattered here and there, throughout magazines and newspapers. 'Vignettes in Rhyme' passed into its third edition; and less than four years after its appearance Mr. Dobson made a second collection of his verses, published in May, 1877, as 'Proverbs in Porcelain.' From these two volumes the author made a selection, adding a few poems written since the appearance of the second book, and thus prepared the collective American volume, called 'Vignettes in Rhyme,' issued by Henry Holt & Co. in 1880, with a graceful and alluring introduction by Mr. Stedman. 'Old-World Idylls,' published in London in the fall of 1883, is based on this American selection of 1880. It has been followed by 'At the Sign of the Lyre,' which includes most of the poetry he wrote before 1885. Unfortunately we have not Mr. Dobson's complete poems even in these two collections, for his own fastidious taste has excluded poems which the less exacting reader had learned to like, and which the admirers of fine humorous verse will not willingly let die. Let us hope that there will be vouchsafed to us, in due time, a volume in which we may treasure Mr. Dobson's 'Complete Poetical Works.' Akin to

the fastidiousness which rejects certain poems altogether—and quite as annoying to many—is the fastidiousness with which the poet is continually going over his verses with a file, polishing until they shine again, smoothing an asperity here, and there rubbing out a blot. This is always a dangerous pastime, and the poet is rarely well advised who attempts it, as all students of Lord Tennyson will bear witness. If the poet is athirst for perfection, he may lay his poems by for the Horatian space of nine years, but when they are once printed and published, he had best keep his hands off them. Of course the most of Mr. Dobson's alterations are unexceptionable improvements, yet there are a few that we reject with abhorrence.

Mr. Aldrich has said that Mr. Dobson "has the grace of Suckling and the finish of Herrick, and is easily master of both in metrical art." The beauty of his poetry is due in great measure to its lyric lightness. He has many lines and many whole poems which sing themselves into the memory, and cannot be thrust thence. Who that has made acquaintance with the 'Ladies of St. James's' can forget "Phillida, my Phillida"? And who cannot at will call up before him Autonoë and Rosina and Rose and all the other "damosels,

blithe as the belted bees," whom the poet has set before us with so much breezy freshness? To know them is to love them, and to love the poet who has sung them into being. Next to the airy grace and the flowing and unfailing humor which inform all Mr. Dobson's poems, perhaps the quality which most deserves to be singled out is their frank and hearty wholesomeness. There is nothing sickly about them, or morbid, or perverse, as there is about so much contemporary British verse. Mr. Dobson is entirely free from the besetting sin of those minor poets who sing only in a minor key. He has no trace of affectation, and no taint of sentimentality. He is simple and sincere. His delicacy is manly, and not effeminate. There is a courtly dignity about all his work; and there is nowhere a hint of bad taste. Mr. Locker once spoke to me of the 'Unfinished Song,' and said that "the spirit is so beautiful"; and of a truth the spirit of all Mr. Dobson's work is beautiful. There is unfailing elevation. Mr. Dobson, in Joubert's phrase, never forgets that the lyre is a winged instrument. Here is a lyric, not one of his best known, and not in the style he most frequently attempts; but it is lifted out of commonplace, though the subject is

hackneyed and worn; it soars, and sings as it soars, like the lark:

A SONG OF THE FOUR SEASONS.

When Spring comes laughing
By vale and hill,
By wind-flower walking
And daffodil,—
Sing stars of morning,
Sing morning skies,
Sing blue of speedwell,
And my Love's eyes.

When comes the Summer,
Full-leaved and strong,
And gay birds gossip
The orchard long,—
Sing hid, sweet honey
That no bee sips;
Sing red, red roses,
And my Love's lips.

When Autumn scatters
The leaves again,
And piled sheaves bury
The broad-wheeled wain,—
Sing flutes of harvest
Where men rejoice;
Sing rounds of reapers,
And my Love's voice.

But when comes Winter
With hail and storm,
And red fire roaring
And ingle warm,—
Sing first sad going
Of friends that part;
Then sing glad meeting,
And my Love's heart.

And with all this elevation and lyric lightness there is no lack of true pathos and genuine feeling for the lowly and the hopeless. More than once has Mr. Dobson expressed his sympathy for the striving, and especially for those strugglers who are handicapped in the race, and who eat their hearts in silent revolt against hard circumstances:

Ah, Reader, ere you turn the page,
I leave you this for moral:—
Remember those who tread life's stage
With weary feet and scantest wage,
And ne'er a leaf for laurel.

The best of Mr. Dobson's poems result from a happy mingling of a broad and genial humanity with an extraordinarily fine artistic instinct. Just as Chopin declared that there were paintings at the sight of which he heard music, so it may be said that there are poems the hearing of which calls up a whole gallery of pictures. Side by side with

the purely lyric pieces are as many more as purely pictorial. The 'Curé's Progress,' for example, is it not a like masterpiece of *genre?* And the ballade 'On a Fan, that Belonged to the Marquise de Pompadour,' with its wonderful movement and spirit, and its apt suggestion of the courtiers and courtesans "throngingthe *Œil-de-Bœuf* through," is it not a perfect picture of

> The little great, the infinite small thing
> That ruled the hour when Louis Quinze was king?

This is a Fragonard, as the other is a Meissonnier. It is not that the pathetic 'Story of Rosina' has for its hero François Boucher, or that other poems abound in references to Watteau and Vanloo and Hogarth; it is not even that these references are never at random, and always reveal an exact knowledge and a nice appreciation; it is rather that Mr. Dobson is a painter at heart, in a degree far from common even in these days of so-called "word-painting." He excels in the art of calling up a scene before you by a few motions of his magic pen; and, once evoked, the scene abides with you alway. Mr. E. A. Abbey told me that once in a nook of rural England he happened suddenly on a sun-dial, and that lines from Mr. Dobson's poem with that title rose to his lips at

once, and he felt as though nature had illustrated the poet.

This delightful effect is produced by no abuse of the customary devices of "word-painting," and by no squandering of "local color." On the contrary, Mr. Dobson is sober in his details, and rarely wastes time in description. He hits off a scene in a few happy strokes; there is no piling of a Pelion of adjectives on an Ossa of epithets. The picture is painted with the utmost economy of stroke. Mr. Dobson's method is like that of the etchers who work in the bath; his hand needs to be both swift and sure. Thus there is always a perfect unity of tone; there is always a shutting out of everything which is not essential to the picture. Consider the ballad of the Armada and the 'Ballad of Beau Brocade,'—a great favorite with Dr. Holmes, by the way,—and see if one is not as truly seventeenth century in thought and feeling as the other is eighteenth century, while both are thoroughly and robustly English. And how captivatingly Chinese are the verses about the "little blue mandarin"!

Of the French pictures I have already spoken, but inadequately, since I omitted to cite the 'Proverbs in Porcelain," which I should ascribe to a French poet, if I knew any Frenchman who could

have accomplished so winning a commingling of banter and of grace, of high breeding and of playfulness. How Roman are the various Horatian lyrics, and, above all, how Greek is 'Autonoë'! "'Autonoë,'" as a friend writes me, "is the most purely beautiful of all Mr. Dobson's work. It does not touch the heart, but it rests the spirit. Most so-called 'classicism' shows us only the white temple, the clear high sky, the outward beauty of form and color. This gives us the warm air of spring and the life that pulses in a girl's veins like the soft swelling of sap in a young tree. This is the same feeling that raises 'As You Like It' above all pastoral poetry. Our nineteenth century sensibilities are so played on by the troubles, the sorrows, the little vital needs and anxieties of the world around us, that sometimes it does us good to get out into the woods and fields of another world entirely, if only the atmosphere is not chilled and rarefied by the lack of the breath of humanity. There are times when the 'Drama of the Doctor's Window' would excite us, but when 'Autonoë' would rest us—and not with a mere selfish intellectual rest."

About twelve years ago, early in 1876, Mr. Dobson began to turn his attention to what are generally known as the French forms of verse, although

they are not all of them French. Oddly enough, it happens that the introduction, at Mr. Dobson's hands, of these French forms into English literature is due—indirectly at least—to an American. In criticising Mr. Dobson's earlier verses in 'Victorian Poets,' Mr. Stedman amiably admonished him that "such a poet, to hold the hearts he has won, not only must maintain his quality, but strive to vary his style." This warning from the American critic, this particular Victorian poet, perhaps having some inner monitions of his own, took to heart, and he began at once to cast about for some new thing. His first find was the 'Odes Funambulesques' of M. Théodore de Banville, the reviver of the triolet, the rondeau, and the ballade. Here was a new thing—a truly new thing, since it was avowedly an old thing. Mr. Dobson had written a set of triolets already, in 1874; it was in May, 1876, that he published the first original ballade ever written in English, the firm and vigorous 'Prodigals,' slightly irregular in its repetition of rhymes, but none the less a most honorable beginning. Almost at the same time he attempted also the rondeau and the rondel. A year later, in May, 1877, he published his second volume of verse, 'Proverbs in Porcelain,' and this, followed almost immediately by Mr. Gosse's easy and learned 'Plea

for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse,' in the *Cornhill Magazine* of July, 1877, drew general attention to the new weapons with which the poet's armory had been enriched.

It would be idle to maintain that they have met with universal acceptance. Mr. Stedman, when introducing the author to the American public, confesses that he is not certain whether to thank Mr. Dobson or to condole with him on bringing into fashion the ballade and the rondeau and its fellows. Perhaps this was partly due to the sudden rush of versifiers who wreaked themselves on these forms, and did their little best to bring them into disrepute. Perhaps it was due to a wider dislike of metrical limitations and of all that tempts the poet to expend any of his strength otherwise than on the straightforward delivery of his message.

Yet rhyme itself, as M. Edmond Schérer tells us, "is a very curious thing, and it is a very complex pleasure which it gives. We do not like to confess how great in every art is the share of difficulty vanquished, and yet it is difficulty vanquished which gives the impression of surprise, and it is surprise which gives interest; it is the unexpected which gives us the sense of the writer's power." The testimony of Sidney Lanier—an untiring student of his art and its science—is to

the same effect: "It is only cleverness and small talent which is afraid of its spontaneity; the genius, the great artist, is forever ravenous after new forms, after technic; he will follow you to the ends of the earth, if you will enlarge his artistic science, if you will give him a fresh form." Finally, the fact remains that great poets—Dante, Milton, Wordsworth—have not scorned the sonnet's scanty plot of ground; and the sonnet is as rigid and quite as difficult, if you play the game fairly, as either the ballade or the rondeau. The rondeau and rondel, have they not a charm of their own when handled by a genuine poet? And the ballade,—that little three-act comedy in rhyme with its epigram-epilogue of an envoy,—has it not both variety and dignity?

For the Malayan pantoum, as for the Franco-Italian sestina, with their enervating and exasperating monotony, there is really nothing to be said. And perhaps there is no need to say much for the tiny triolet, effective as it may be for occasional epigram, or for the elaborate and stately chant-royal, which is a feat of skill, no more and no less; that Mr. Dobson has done it as well as he has suggests, perhaps, only the pertinent query as to whether it was well worth doing. Perhaps no more must be said in favor of the dainty

little villanelle—a form which exists under the greatest disadvantage, since the first and typical specimen, the ever fresh and graceful 'J'ai perdu ma tourterelle' of Passerat, remains to this day unsurpassable and unapproached. But the rondeau and rondel carry no such weight, and in the hands of a master of metres they are capable of being filled with a simple beauty most enjoyable. What could be more delicate, more pensive, more charming than this rondel of Mr. Dobson's?—

THE WANDERER.

Love comes back to his vacant dwelling,—
The old, old Love that we knew of yore!
We see him stand by the open door,
With his great eyes sad, and his bosom swelling.

He makes as though in our arms repelling,
He fain would lie as he lay before;—
Love comes back to his vacant dwelling,—
The old, old Love that we knew of yore!

Ah, who shall help us from over-telling
That sweet forgotten, forbidden lore!
E'en as we doubt in our heart once more,
With a rush of tears to our eyelids welling,
Love comes back to his vacant dwelling.

The ballade, however, is by far the best of all these forms. I hold it second to the sonnet alone,

and for some purposes superior even to the sonnet. It is fair to say that it is the only one of the French poems which in France itself has held its own against the Italian sonnet. The instrument used by Clément Marot, by Villon,—that "voice out of the slums of Paris," as Mr. Matthew Arnold called him,—by La Fontaine, and in later times by Albert Glatigny and Théodore de Banville, is surely worthy of honor. In Villon's hands it has dignity and depth, in Glatigny's it has pathos, and in Marot's, in Mr. Dobson's, and in Mr. Lang's it has playfulness and gayety. I believe Mr. Dobson himself likes the 'Ballade of Imitation' better than any of his other ballades, while I confess my own preference for the 'Ballade of Prose and Rhyme,' the only *ballade à double refrain* worthy to be set alongside Clément Marot's 'Frère Lubin.' It is almost too familiar to quote here at length, and yet it must be quoted perforce, for nohow else can I get the testimony of my best witness fully before the jury:

THE BALLADE OF PROSE AND RHYME.

(Ballade à Double Refrain.)

When the ways are heavy with mire and rut,
In November fogs, in December snows,
When the North Wind howls, and the doors are shut,—
There is place and enough for the pains of prose;

But whenever a scent from the whitethorn blows,
And the jasmine-stars at the casement climb,
And a Rosalind-face at the lattice shows,
Then hey!—for the ripple of laughing rhyme!

When the brain gets dry as an empty nut,
When the reason stands on its squarest toes,
When the mind (like a beard) has a "formal cut,"—
There is place and enough for the pains of prose;
But whenever the May-blood stirs and glows,
And the young year draws to the "golden prime"
And Sir Romeo sticks in his ear a rose,—
Then hey!—for the ripple of laughing rhyme!

In a theme where the thoughts have a pedant-strut,
In a changing quarrel of "Ayes" and "Noes,"
In a starched procession of "If" and "But,"—
There is place and enough for the pains of prose;
But whenever a soft glance softer grows
And the light hours dance to the trysting-time,
And the secret is told "that no one knows,"—
Then hey!—for the ripple of laughing rhyme!

ENVOY.

In the work-a-day world,—for its needs and woes,
There is place and enough for the pains of prose;
But whenever the May-bells clash and chime,
Then hey!—for the ripple of laughing rhyme!

It seems to me that in these poems Mr. Dobson proves that the rondel at its best and the ballade at its finest, belong to the poetry of feeling and

not to the poetry of ingenuity. It seems to me, also, that the poet has been helped by his restrictions. Here are cases where a faith in these forms is justified by works. We may ask, fairly enough, whether either of these poems would be as good in any other shape. From the compression enforced by the rules, they have gained in compactness, and therefore in swiftness. They are, in Miltonic phrase, "woven close, both matter, form, and style."

It is to Mr. Dobson primarily and to his fellow-workers that the credit is due of acclimatizing these exotic metres in English literature. It is not that he was absolutely the earliest to write them in English — excepting only the ballade, of which the 'Prodigals' was the first. Chaucer wrote rondels, the elder Wyatt rondeaus, and Patrick Carey, about 1651, was guilty of devotional triolets! But England was not then ready for the conquest, and the forms crossed the Channel, like the Norseman, just to set foot on land and then away again. Even in France they had faded out of sight. Molière speaks slightingly of ballades as old-fashioned. Only in our own times, since M. de Banville set the example, has the true form been understood. Wyatt's rondeaus were printed as though they were defective sonnets. Both

Longfellow and Bryant translated Clément Marot's 'Frère Lubin,' and neither of them knew it was a *ballade à double refrain*. Nor is Rossetti's noble rendering of Villon's famous 'Ballade of Dead Ladies' accurately formal. Mr. Lang, in his 'Ballads and Lyrics of Old France' (1872), was plainly on the right track, but he failed then to reach the goal. At last the time was ripe.

It was doubtless again due to Mr. Stedman's warning that, although there is no work which when well done secures a welcome as instant as *vers de société*, there is also "none from which the world so lightly turns upon the arrival of a new favorite with a different note,"—it was this wise warning which led Mr. Dobson to vary his style, not only with the revival of the French forms, but also with fables and with a slight attempt at the drama—in so far as the dainty and delicate 'Proverbs in Porcelain' are substantial enough to be called dramatic. Like John Gay and like the late John G. Saxe, Mr. Dobson took to rhyming fables after making a mark by more characteristic verse. And Mr. Dobson's fables, good as they are, and pertinent and brightsome as they needs must be, since he wrote them, are like Gay's and Saxe's in that they are not their author's best work. The fault plainly is in the fable form,

if Mr. Dobson's fables are not as entertaining as his other poems; at any rate, I am free to confess that I like his other work better.

I have to confess, also, with great doubt and diffidence, that the half-dozen little dialogues called 'Proverbs in Porcelain,' airy as they are and exquisite, are less favorites with me than they are with critics whose taste I cannot but think finer than mine—Mr. Aldrich, for instance, and Mr. Stedman. I am inclined to believe I like them less because they assume a dramatic form without warrant. The essence of the drama is action, and in these beautiful and witty playlets there is but the ghost of an action. I doubt not that I am unfair to these dialogues, and that my attitude toward them is that of the dramatic critic rather than that of the critic of poetry pure and simple. But that is their own fault for assuming a virtue they have not. To counterbalance this harsh treatment of the 'Proverbs in Porcelain,' I must declare that I take more pleasure in 'A Virtuoso' than do most of Mr. Dobson's admirers, and for the same reason. I find in 'A Virtuoso' all the condensed compactness of the best stage dialogue, where a phrase has to be stripped to run for its life. To be read quickly by the fireside, 'A Virtuoso' may seem forced; but to be acted or

recited, it is just right. I see in this cold and cutting poem, masterly in its synthesis of selfish symptoms, a regard for theatrical perspective, and a selection and a heightening of effect in accordance with the needs of the stage, which I confess I fail to find in the seemingly more dramatic 'Proverbs in Porcelain.' Most people, however, liking Mr. Dobson mainly for playful tenderness and tender playfulness, dislike the marble hardness of 'A Virtuoso,' just as they are annoyed by the tone of 'A Love-letter,' one of the poet's cleverest pieces. If Mr. Dobson yielded to the likes and dislikes of his admirers he would soon sink into sentimentality, and he would never dare to write as funny as he can. There are readers who are shocked and pained when they discover the non-existence of 'Dorothy.'

After all, this is perhaps the highest compliment that readers can pay the writer, when they enter so heartily into his creations that they revolt against any trick he may play upon them. And in these days of haste without rest, it ill becomes us to fling the first stone at an author who is enamored of elusive perfection and who is willing to spare no pains to give us his best and only his best. He may be thankful that he is not as infertile on the one hand as Waller, who was "the

greater part of a summer correcting *ten* lines for Her Grace of York's copy of Tasso," or as reckless on the other hand as Martial, who disdained to elaborate:

> Turpe est difficile habere nugas
> Et stultus labor est ineptiarum.

Not infrequently do we find Mr. Frederick Locker and Mr. Dobson classed together as though their work was fundamentally of the same kind. The present writer has to plead guilty to the charge of inadvertently and inaccurately linking the two names in critical discussion. The likeness is accidental rather than essential, and the hasty conjunction is due, perhaps, more to the fact that they are friends, and that they both write what has to be called *vers de société*, than to any real likeness between their works. The fact is, the more clearly we define, and the more precisely we limit the phrase *vers de société*, the more exactly do we find the best and most characteristic of Mr. Locker's poems agreeing with the definition and lying at ease within the limitation; while the best and most characteristic of Mr. Dobson's poems would be left outside. In his criticism of Praed's work prefixed to the selection from his poems in the fourth volume of Mr. Ward's 'English Poets' Mr.

Dobson declares that "as a writer of 'society verse' in its exacter sense, Praed was justly acknowledged to be supreme," and then he adds, "We say 'exacter sense' because it has of late become the fashion to apply this vague term in the vaguest way possible so as to include almost all verse but the highest and the lowest. This is manifestly a mistake. Society verse as Praed understood it, and as we understand it in Praed, treats almost exclusively of the *votum, timor, ira, voluptas* (and especially the *voluptas)* of that charmed circle of uncertain limits known conventionally as 'good society'—those latter-day Athenians who, in town and country, spend their time in telling or hearing some new thing, and whose graver and deeper impulses are subordinated to a code of artificial manners." Of these it is indisputable that Mr. Locker is, as Praed was, the laureate-elect, and that "the narrow world in which they move is the main haunt and region of his song." Mr. Locker writes as one to the manner born, and nowhere reveals the touch of the parvenu which betrayed Praed now and again. In the exact sense of the phrase, Mr. Locker, like Praed, is the poet of society, which Mr. Dobson is not—because, for one thing, we may doubt whether society is of quite so much interest or importance or significance to him

as to the author of 'London Lyrics.' The distinction is evasive, and has to be suggested rather than said; but it is none the less real and vital. It is, perhaps, rather that Mr. Dobson is more a man of letters, while Mr. Locker is more a man of the world. Certainly Mr. Dobson has a more consciously literary style than Mr. Locker, a style less simple and less direct. Henri Monnier would say that Mr. Dobson had more *mots d'auteur*. Admirable as is Mr. Dobson's verse, it has not the condensed clearness nor the incisive vigor of Mr. Locker's. One inclines to the opinion that the author of 'London Lyrics' is willing to make more sacrifices for vernacular terseness than the author of 'Vignettes in Rhyme.' It is not that Mr. Dobson is one of the poets who keep their choicest wares locked in an inner safe guarded by heavy bolts, and to whose wisdom no man may help himself unless he has the mystic letters which unlock the massive doors, but he is not quite willing to be simple to the point of bareness as is Mr. Locker, who wears his heart upon his sleeve. In some things Mr. Locker is like Mr. du Maurier, even in the little Gallic twist, while Mr. Dobson is rather like Randolph Caldecott or our own Abbey, with the quaint Englishry of whose style Mr. Dobson's has much in common. Yet after say-

ing this I feel inclined to take it all back, for I recall together 'This was the Pompadour's fan' and 'This is Gerty's glove'—and here it is Mr. Dobson who is brilliant and French and Mr. Locker who is more simple in sentiment and more English. Yet again it is the worldly-minded Mr. Locker who declares that

> The world's as ugly, aye, as sin—
> And nearly as delightful,—

a sentiment wholly foreign to Mr. Dobson's feelings. This suggests that there is a certain town stamp in the appropriately named 'London Lyrics' not to be seen in 'Vignettes in Rhyme,' some of which are vignettes from rural nature. But both books are boons to be thankful for. Both are havens of rest in days of depression; both have a joyousness most tonic and wholesome in these days when the general tone of literature is gray; both preach the gospel of sanity, and both may serve as antiseptics against sentimental decay.

Here occasion serves to say that each of these masters of what Dr. Johnson, while declaring its difficulty, called "easy verse," has set forth his views of the art of writing *vers de société*. Mr. Locker made his declaration of faith in the admirable preface, all too brief, to the selection of *vers*

de société and *vers d'occasion*, which he published in 1867 as 'Lyra Elegantiarum.' Mr. Dobson, at the request of the present writer, drew up a code for the composition of familiar verse. Here are Mr. Dobson's 'Twelve Good Rules':

I. Never be vulgar.
II. Avoid slang and puns.
III. Avoid inversions.
IV. Be sparing of long words.
V. Be colloquial, but not commonplace.
VI. Choose the lightest and brightest of measures.
VII. Let the rhymes be frequent, but not forced.
VIII. Let them be rigorously exact to the ear.
IX. Be as witty as you like.
X. Be serious by accident.
XI. Be pathetic with the greatest discretion.
XII. Never ask if the writer of these rules has observed them himself.

Mr. Dobson has not confined his labors in prose to the canons of familiar verse. Although it is as a poet that he is most widely known, his prose has qualities of its own. Besides scattering magazine articles, it includes half a dozen apt and alert criticisms in Mr. Ward's 'English Poets,' the final chapter in Mr. Lang's little book on the 'Library,' and prefaces to a fac-simile reprint of 'Robinson Crusoe,' and to the selection from Herrick's

poems, illustrated by Mr. Abbey with such abundant sympathy and such delightful grace and fancy. More important than these are the volumes in which Mr. Dobson has given us selections from the best of the 'Eighteenth Century Essays,' and in which he has introduced and annotated the 'Fables' of John Gay, the 'Poems' and 'Vicar of Wakefield' of Oliver Goldsmith, the 'Essays' of Richard Steele, and the 'Barbier de Séville' of Beaumarchais.

Still more important are the biographical sketches of his favorite Hogarth, and of Bewick and his pupils; and the lives of Fielding, Steele, and Goldsmith. It was to Mr. Dobson's biography that Mr. Lowell referred when he unveiled Miss Margaret Thomas's bust of Fielding in the Somersetshire hall. In the course of his speech, as rich and eloquent as only his speeches are, Mr. Lowell said that "Mr. Austin Dobson has done, perhaps, as true a service as one man of letters ever did to another, by reducing what little is known of the life of Fielding from chaos to coherence, by ridding it of fable, by correcting and coördinating dates, by cross-examining tradition till it stammeringly confessed that it had no visible means of subsistence, and has thus enabled us to get some authentic glimpse of the man as he really was. Lessing

gives the title of 'Rescues' to the essays in which he strove to rehabilitate such authors as had been, in his judgment, unjustly treated by their contemporaries, and Mr. Dobson's essay deserves to be reckoned in the same category. He has rescued the body of Fielding from beneath the swinish hoofs which were trampling it as once they trampled the Knight of La Mancha, whom Fielding so heartily admired."

It has been well said that the study of practice of verse is the best of trainings for the writing of prose. Mr. Dobson's prose style is firm and precise; it has no taint of the Corinthian luxuriance which Mr. Matthew Arnold has castigated, or of the passionate emphasis which passes for criticism in some quarters. His ideal in prose writing is a style exact and cool and straightforward. Sometimes the reader might like a little more glow. It is not that his prose style is sapless, for it has life; it is rather that it is generally cut-and-dried of malice prepense. He can write prose with more color and more heat when he chooses, as he who will may see in the paragraphs of the preface to Mr. Abbey's 'Herrick.' In general, however, Mr. Dobson forgets that he is a poet when he takes up his pen to write prose, and he remembers only that he is an antiquary

and an investigator. In fact, his prose is the prose of a scientific historian; and Mr. Dobson has the scientific virtues,—the passion for exactness, the untiring patience in research, and the unwillingness to set down anything which has not been proved. If we apply De Quincey's classification, we should declare that Mr. Dobson's poetry—like all true poetry—belongs to the literature of power, while his prose belongs to the literature of knowledge.

It is to be remarked, also, that the poet sometimes remembers that he is an antiquary, also. Here Mr. Dobson is not unlike Walter Scott, who was also an antiquary-poet, with a strong love for the past, and a gift for making dead figures start to life at his bidding. Much of Mr. Dobson's poetry is like his prose in that it is based on research. His learning in the manners and customs of past times is most minute. Especially rich is his knowledge of the people and of the vocabulary of the eighteenth century. This is the result of indefatigable delving in the records of the past. His acquaintance with the ways and words of the contemporaries of Steele and of Fielding and of Hogarth is as thorough as Lord Tennyson's knowledge of botany, for instance; and it is the proof of as much minute observation. Although Mr.

Dobson disdains all second-hand information, and likes to verify facts for himself, he never lets his learning burden his verse. That runs as freely and as trippingly as though the seeking of the facts on which it might be founded had not been a labor of love, for which no toil was too great. The 'Ballad of Beau Brocade' is a strong and simple tale, seemingly calling for no special study; but it does not contain a single word not in actual use at the time of the guide-book where it germinated, and in print in the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine* of that reign. In like manner, in the noble and virile ballade of the Armada, which the Virgin Queen might have joyed to accept, there is no single word not in Gervase Markham.

Writing always out of the fulness of knowledge, there is nowhere anything amateurish, and there is always a perfect certainty of touch. His work—as Mr. W. C. Brownell has told us—is "as natural an outgrowth as Lamb's." And he is like Lamb in that capacity for taking infinite pains which has been held the true trade-mark of genius. He is like Lamb, again, in that he has resolutely recognized his limitations. Ruler of his own territory, he has carefully refrained from crossing his neighbor's boundaries. Indeed, he is as admirable an instance as one could wish of the

exactness of Swift's dictum, "It is an uncontrolled truth that no man ever made an ill figure who understood his own talents, nor a good one who mistook them."

(1884)

VII

THE SONGS OF THE CIVIL WAR

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NATIONAL hymn is one of the things which cannot be made to order. No man has ever yet sat him down and taken up his pen and said, "I will write a national hymn," and composed either words or music which a nation was willing to take for its own. The making of the song of the people is a happy accident, not to be accomplished by taking thought. It must be the result of fiery feeling long confined, and suddenly finding vent in burning words or moving strains. Sometimes the heat and the pressure of emotion have been fierce enough and intense enough to call forth at once both words and music, and to weld them together indissolubly once and for all. Almost always the maker of the song does not suspect the abiding value of his work; he has wrought unconsciously, moved by a power within; he has written for immediate

relief to himself, and with no thought of fame or the future; he has builded better than he knew. The great national lyric is the result of the conjunction of the hour and the man. Monarchs cannot command it, and even poets are often powerless to achieve it. No one of the great national hymns has been written by a great poet. But for his single immortal lyric, neither the author of the 'Marseillaise' nor the author of the 'Wacht am Rhein' would have his line in the biographical dictionaries. But when a song has once taken root in the hearts of a people, time itself is powerless against it. The flat and feeble 'Partant pour la Syrie,' which a filial fiat made the hymn of imperial France, had to give way to the strong and virile notes of the 'Marseillaise,' when need was to arouse the martial spirit of the French in 1870. The noble measures of 'God Save the King,' as simple and dignified a national hymn as any country can boast, lift up the hearts of the English people; and the brisk tune of the 'British Grenadiers' has swept away many a man into the ranks of the recruiting regiment. The English are rich in war tunes; and the pathetic 'Girl I left behind me' encourages and sustains both those who go to the front and those who remain at home. Here in the United States we have no 'Marseillaise,' no

'God Save the King,' no 'Wacht am Rhein'; we have but 'Yankee Doodle' and the 'Star-spangled Banner.' More than one enterprising poet, and more than one aspiring musician, has volunteered to take the contract to supply the deficiency; as yet no one has succeeded. 'Yankee Doodle' we got during the Revolution, and the 'Star-spangled Banner' was the gift of the War of 1812; from the Civil War we have received at least two war songs which, as war songs simply, are stronger and finer than either of these—'John Brown's Body' and 'Marching Through Georgia.'

Of the lyrical outburst which the war called forth but little trace is now to be detected in literature except by special students. In most cases neither words nor music have had vitality enough to survive a quarter of a century. Chiefly, indeed, two things only survive, one Southern and the other Northern; one a war-cry in verse, the other a martial tune: one is the lyric 'My Maryland,' and the other is the marching song 'John Brown's Body.' The origin and development of the latter, the rude chant to which a million of the soldiers of the Union kept time, is uncertain and involved in dispute. The history of the former may be declared exactly, and by the courtesy of those who did the deed—for the making of a war song is of a

truth a deed at arms—I am enabled to state fully the circumstances under which it was written, set to music, and first sung before the soldiers of the South.

'My Maryland' was written by Mr. James R. Randall, a native of Baltimore, and now residing in Augusta, Georgia. The poet was a professor of English literature and the classics in Poydras College at Pointe Coupée, on the Fausse Rivière, in Louisiana, about seven miles from the Mississippi; and there in April, 1861, he read in the New Orleans *Delta* the news of the attack on the Massachusetts troops as they passed through Baltimore. "This account excited me greatly," Mr. Randall wrote in answer to my request for information; "I had long been absent from my native city, and the startling event there inflamed my mind. That night I could not sleep, for my nerves were all unstrung, and I could not dismiss what I had read in the paper from my mind. About midnight I rose, lit a candle, and went to my desk. Some powerful spirit appeared to possess me, and almost involuntarily I proceeded to write the song of 'My Maryland.' I remember that the idea appeared to first take shape as music in the brain—some wild air that I cannot now recall. The whole poem was dashed off rapidly

when once begun. It was not composed in cold blood, but under what may be called a conflagration of the senses, if not an inspiration of the intellect. I was stirred to a desire for some way linking my name with that of my native State, if not 'with my land's language.' But I never expected to do this with one single, supreme effort, and no one was more surprised than I was at the widespread and instantaneous popularity of the lyric I had been so strangely stimulated to write." Mr. Randall read the poem the next morning to the college boys, and at their suggestion sent it to the *Delta*, in which it was first printed, and from which it was copied into nearly every Southern journal. "I did not concern myself much about it, but very soon, from all parts of the country, there was borne to me, in my remote place of residence, evidence that I had made a great hit, and that, whatever might be the fate of the Confederacy, the song would survive it."

Published in the last days of April, 1861, when every eye was fixed on the border States, the stirring stanzas of the Tyrtæan bard appeared in the very nick of time. There is often a feeling afloat in the minds of men, undefined and vague for want of one to give it form, and held in solution, as it were, until a chance word dropped in the ear

of a poet suddenly crystallizes this feeling into song, in which all may see clearly and sharply reflected what in their own thought was shapeless and hazy. It was Mr. Randall's good fortune to be the instrument through which the South spoke. By a natural reaction his burning lines helped to fire the Southern heart. To do their work well, his words needed to be wedded to music. Unlike the authors of the 'Star-spangled Banner' and the 'Marseillaise,' the author of 'My Maryland' had not written it to fit a tune already familiar. It was left for a lady of Baltimore to lend the lyric the musical wings it needed to enable it to reach every camp-fire of the Southern armies. To the courtesy of this lady, then Miss Hetty Cary, and now the wife of Professor H. Newell Martin, of Johns Hopkins University, I am indebted for a picturesque description of the marriage of the words to the music, and of the first singing of the song before the Southern troops.

The house of Mrs. Martin's father was the headquarters for the Southern sympathizers of Baltimore. Correspondence, money, clothing, supplies of all kinds went thence through the lines to the young men of the city who had joined the Confederate army. "The enthusiasm of the girls who worked and of the 'boys' who watched for

their chance to slip through the lines to Dixie's land found vent and inspiration in such patriotic songs as could be made or adapted to suit our needs. The glee club was to hold its meeting in our parlors one evening early in June, and my sister, Miss Jenny Cary, being the only musical member of the family, had charge of the programme on the occasion. With a school-girl's eagerness to score a success, she resolved to secure some new and ardent expression of feelings that by this time were wrought up to the point of explosion. In vain she searched through her stock of songs and airs—nothing seemed intense enough to suit her. Aroused by her tone of despair, I came to the rescue with the suggestion that she should adapt the words of 'Maryland, my Maryland,' which had been constantly on my lips since the appearance of the lyric a few days before in the South. I produced the paper and began declaiming the verses. 'Lauriger Horatius,' she exclaimed, and in a flash the immortal song found voice in the stirring air so perfectly adapted to it. That night, when her contralto voice rang out the stanzas, the refrain rolled forth from every throat present without pause or preparation; and the enthusiasm communicated itself with such effect to a crowd assembled beneath our open windows as to endanger seriously the liberties of the party."

'Lauriger Horatius' has long been a favorite college song, and it had been introduced into the Cary household by Mr. Burton N. Harrison, then a Yale student. The air to which it is sung is used also for a lovely German lyric, 'Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum,' which Longfellow has translated 'O Hemlock Tree.' The transmigration of tunes is too large and fertile a subject for me to do more here than refer to it. The taking of the air of a jovial college song to use as the setting of a fiery war-lyric may seem strange and curious, but only to those who are not familiar with the adventures and transformations a tune is often made to undergo. Hopkinson's 'Hail Columbia!' for example, was written to the tune of the 'President's March,' just as Mrs. Howe's 'Battle Hymn of the Republic' was written to 'John Brown's Body.' The 'Wearing of the Green,' of the Irishman, is sung to the same air as the 'Benny Havens, O!' of the West-Pointer. The 'Star-spangled Banner' has to make shift with the second-hand music of 'Anacreon in Heaven,' while our other national air, 'Yankee Doodle,' uses over the notes of an old English nursery rhyme, 'Lucy Locket,' once a personal lampoon in the days of the 'Beggars' Opera,' and now surviving in the 'Baby's Opera' of Mr. Walter Crane. 'My Country, 'tis of Thee,' is set to the

truly British tune of 'God Save the King,' the origin of which is doubtful, as it is claimed by the French and the Germans as well as the English. In the hour of battle a war-tune is subject to the right of capture, and, like the cannon taken from the enemy, it is turned against its maker.

To return to 'My Maryland':—a few weeks after the welding of the words and the music, Mrs. Martin, with her husband and sister, went through the lines, convoying several trunks full of military clothing, and wearing concealed about her person a flag bearing the arms of Maryland, a gift from the ladies of Baltimore to the Maryland troops in the Confederate army. In consequence of reports which were borne back to the Union authorities the ladies were forbidden to return. "We were living," so Mrs. Martin writes me, "in Virginia in exile, when, shortly after the battle of Manassas, General Beauregard, hearing of our labors and sufferings in behalf of the Marylanders who had already done such gallant service in his command, invited us to visit them at his headquarters near Fairfax Court House, sending a pass and an escort for us, and the friends by whom we should be accompanied. Our party encamped the first night in tents prepared for us at Manassas, with my kinsman, Captain Sterrell, who was in charge of the

fortifications there. We were serenaded by the famous Washington Artillery of New Orleans, aided by all the fine voices within reach. Captain Sterrell expressed our thanks, and asked if there were any service we might render in return. 'Let us hear a woman's voice,' was the cry which arose in response. And, standing in the tent-door, under cover of the darkness, my sister sang 'My Maryland!' This, I believe, was the birth of the song in the army. The refrain was speedily caught up and tossed back to us from hundreds of rebel throats. As the last notes died away there surged forth from the gathering throng a wild shout—'*We* will break her chains! She *shall* be be free! She *shall* be free! Three cheers and a tiger for Maryland!' And they were given with a will. There was not a dry eye in the tent, and, we were told the next day, not a cap with a rim on it in camp. Nothing could have kept Mr. Randall's verses from living and growing into a power. To us fell the happy chance of first giving them voice. In a few weeks 'My Maryland!' had found its way to the hearts of our whole people, and become a great national song."

I wish I could call as charming and as striking a witness to set forth the origin of 'John Brown's Body.' The genesis of both words and music is

obscure and involved. The raw facts of historical criticism — names, places, dates — are deficient. The martial hymn has been called a spontaneous generation of the uprising of the North — a self-made song, which sang itself into being of its own accord. Some have treated it as a sudden evolution from the inner consciousness of the early soldiers all aglow with free-soil enthusiasm; and these speak of it as springing, like Minerva from the head of Jove, full armed and mature. Others have more happily likened it to Topsy, in that it never was born, it growed; and this latter theory has the support of the facts as far as they can be disentangled from a maze of fiction and legend. A tentative and conjectural reconstruction of the story of the song is all I dare venture upon; and I stand corrected in anticipation.

The Latter-day Saints of 1843 had a camp-meeting song referring to the Second Advent, 'Say, brothers, will you meet us?' Whence this tune came, and whether or not it is a native negro air, I have been wholly unable to discover. I can be certain only of its later popularity. Within fifteen years it spread over the country. Mr. C. G. Leland says that the song "was a great favorite with John Brown" and that "it was sung with an improvised variation adapted to John Brown him-

self by those who were in his funeral as it passed through the streets of New-York."

John Brown was hanged in December, 1859. A little more than a year later the report of the shot against the flag at Sumter rang through all the States and startled the blood of every man in the nation. Then suddenly the new song of 'John Brown's Body' sprang into being. It was the song of the hour. There was a special taunt to the South in the use of the name of the martyr of abolition, while to the North that name was as a slogan. As the poet — a prophet again, for once — had written when John Brown was yet alive, though condemned to death:

But, Virginians, don't do it! for I tell you that the flagon,
Filled with blood of old Brown's offspring, was first poured by Southern hands;
And each drop from old Brown's life-veins, like the red gore of the dragon,
May spring up a vengeful fury, hissing through your slave-worn lands!
And old Brown,
Osawatomie Brown,
May trouble you more than ever, when you've nailed his coffin down!

The putting together of the rude version first sung in the rising heat of the war fever, the fitting

of plain rough words to the tune of 'Say, brothers, will you meet us?'—the tune of which was made more marked, and modified to a march—seems to have been done by a little knot of men in the second battalion, the Tigers, a Massachusetts command quartered at Fort Warren, in Boston Harbor, in April, 1861, just at the time when 'My Maryland' was getting itself sung at the South. A writer in the Boston *Herald* says that "the manner in which 'the old tune' was taken to Fort Warren was simple. Two members of the Tigers were present at a camp-meeting service in a small town in New Hampshire during the fall preceding the occupancy of the fort," and they learned the air there. Their names were Purrington and Brown; and when the Tigers went to the fort and joined the 12th regiment, these two vocalists took unto themselves two more, Edgerly and Greenleaf—the latter a professional musician. By this quartet the rudimentary John Brown song seems to have been evolved out of the old camp-meeting lyric. Beyond all question it was the Webster regiment which first adopted 'John Brown's Body' as a marching song. The soldiers of this regiment sang it as they marched down Broadway, in New-York, July 24, 1861, on their way from Boston to the front. They sang it

incessantly until August, 1862, when Colonel Webster died, and when the tune had been taken up by the nation at large and hundreds of thousands of soldiers were marching forward to the fight with the name of John Brown on their lips.

There was a majestic simplicity in the rhythm like the beating of mighty hammers. In the beginning the words were bare to the verge of barrenness. There was no lack of poets to fill them out. Henry Howard Brownell, the singer of the 'Bay Fight' and the 'River Fight,' skilfully utilized the accepted lines, which he enriched with a deeper meaning. Then Mrs. Howe wrote her 'Battle Hymn of the Republic,' perhaps the most resonant and elevated of the poems of American patriotism. Its religious fervor was in consonance with the camp-meeting origin of the song, and even more fully with the intense feeling of the time. Of late the air has been taken again by Mr. William Morris, poet and socialist, decorator and reformer, as the one to which shall be sung his eloquent and stirring 'March of the Workers.'

Curiously enough, the history of 'Dixie' is not at all unlike the history of 'John Brown's Body.' 'Dixie' was composed in 1859, by Mr. Dan D. Emmett, as a "walk-around" for Bryant's minstrels, then performing at Mechanics' Hall in New-

York. Mr. Emmett had travelled with circuses, and had heard the performers refer to the States south of Mason and Dixon's line as "Dixie's land," wishing themselves there as soon as the Northern climate began to be too severe for those who live in tents like the Arabs. It was on this expression of Northern circus performers,

I wish I was in Dixie,

that Mr. Emmett constructed his song. The "walk-around" hit the taste of the New-York play-going public, and it was adopted at once by various bands of wandering minstrels, who sang and danced it in all parts of the Union. In the fall of 1860 Mrs. John Wood sang it in New Orleans in John Brougham's burlesque of 'Pocahontas,' and in New Orleans it took root. Without any authority from the composer, a New Orleans publisher had the air harmonized and arranged, and he issued it with words embodying the strong Southern feeling of the chief city of Louisiana. As from Boston 'John Brown's Body' spread through the North, so from New Orleans 'Dixie' spread through the South; and as Northern poets strove to find fit words for the one, so Southern poets wrote fiery lines to fill the measures of the other. Of the sets of verse written to 'Dixie,' the best, perhaps, is

that by General Albert Pike, of Arkansas, who happens, by a fortuitous chance, to have been a native of Vermont. With Republican words 'Dixie' had been used as a campaign song in 1860; and it was perhaps some vague remembrance of this which prompted Lincoln to have the air played by a band in Washington in 1865, a short time after the surrender at Appomattox, remarking that as we had captured the rebel army we had captured also the rebel tune.

From New Orleans also came another of the songs of the South, the 'Bonnie Blue Flag.' Mr. Randall writes me that 'Dixie' and the 'Bonnie Blue Flag' were the most popular of Southern songs. Like 'Dixie,' the 'Bonnie Blue Flag' came from the theatre. The tune is an old Hibernian melody, the 'Irish Jaunting Car.' The earliest words were written by an Irish comedian, Harry McCarthy, and the song was first sung by his sister, Miss Marion McCarthy, at the Varieties Theatre, in 1861. It was published by Mr. A. E. Blackmar, who wrote to a friend of mine that General Butler "made it very profitable by fining every man, woman, or child who sang, whistled, or played it on any instrument, $25," besides arresting the publisher, destroying the sheet music, and fining him $500. Later a stirring lyric, to be sung

to this air, was written by Miss Annie Chambers Ketcham.

In Louisiana, of course, there was also the 'Marseillaise.' "The Creoles of New Orleans," Mr. Cable has written me, "followed close by the Anglo-Americans of their town, took up the 'Marseillaise' with great enthusiasm, as they have always done whenever a war spirit was up. They did it when the British invaded Louisiana in 1814. It was good enough as it stood; they made no new adaptations of it, but sang it in French and English (I speak of 1861), 'dry so,' as the Southern rustics say. 'Dixie' started with the first mutter of war thunder. . . . I think the same is true of 'Lorena.' This doleful old ditty started at the start, and never stopped till the last musket was stacked and the last camp-fire cold. It was, by all odds, the song nearest the Confederate soldier's heart. It was the 'Annie Laurie' of the Confederate trenches."

Nowadays it is not a little difficult to detect in the rather mushy sentimentality of the words of 'Lorena,' or in the lugubrious wail of its music, any qualities which might account for the affection it was held in. But the vagaries of popular taste are inscrutable. Dr. Palmer's vigorous lyric, 'Stonewall Jackson's Way,' written within sound of the

cannonading at Antietam, was so little sung that Mr. Randall thought it had not been set to music. I have, however, succeeded in discovering two airs to which it was sung—one published by Mr. Blackmar, and the other the familiar 'Duda, duda, day.'

The Northern equivalent of 'Lorena' is to be sought among the songs which made a lyric address to 'Mother,' and of which 'Just before the Battle, Mother,' may be taken as a type. 'Mother, I've Come Home to Die' was sung with feeling and with humor by many a gallant fellow who is now gathered at the bivouac of the dead. Mr. George F. Root, of Chicago, was both the author and composer of 'Just before the Battle, Mother,' as he was also of the 'Battle Cry of Freedom,' and of 'Tramp, Tramp, Tramp; the Boys are Marching.' It is difficult to say which one of these three songs was the most popular; there was a touch of realistic pathos in 'Just before the Battle, Mother,' which brought the simple and unpretending words home to the hearts of the men who had girded on the sword and shouldered the musket. Yet captivity was not seldom more bitter to bear than death itself, and this gave point to the lament of the soldier who sat in his "prison cell" and heard the tramp, tramp, tramp of the marching boys. Probably, however, the first favorite with the soldiers in the

field, and certainly the song of Mr. Root's which has the best chance of surviving, is the 'Battle Cry of Freedom.' It was often ordered to be sung as the men marched into action. More than once its strains arose on the battle-field and made obedience more easy to the lyric command to rally round the flag. With the pleasant humor which never deserts the American, even in the hard tussle of war, the gentle lines of 'Mary had a Little Lamb' were fitted snugly to the tune; and many a regiment shortened a weary march or went gayly into action, singing,

Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,
Shouting the battle-cry of freedom;
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go,
Shouting the battle-cry of freedom.

Now the song is sure of immortality, for it has become a part of those elective studies which are the chief gains of the college curriculum. At the hands of the American college boys, 'Rally round the Flag' can get a renewed lease of life for twenty-one years more — or forever. A boy is your true conservative; he is the genuine guardian of ancient rites and customs, old rhymes and songs; he has the fullest reverence for age — if so be it is not incarnated in a Prof. or the Prex.

Lowell, in declaring the antiquity of the New World, says that "we have also in America things amazingly old, as our boys, for example." And the borrowing of the 'Battle Cry of Freedom' by the colleges is only the fair exchange which is no robbery; for, as we have seen, it was from the college that the air of 'Lauriger Horatius' was taken to speed the heated stanzas of 'My Maryland.' Another college song,—if the digression may be pardoned,—the 'Upidee-Upida,' to which we so wickedly sing the quatrains of Longfellow's 'Excelsior,' I have heard rising sonorously from the throats of a stalwart regiment of German *Landwehr* in the summer of 1870, as they were on their way to the French frontier — and to Paris.

Although they came at the beginning of the war, 'John Brown's Body' and the 'Battle Cry of Freedom' have been sung scarcely more often than 'Marching through Georgia,' which could not have come into being until near the end of the fight. Now that the war has been over for twenty years and more, and the veteran has no military duty more harassing than fighting his battles o'er, 'Marching through Georgia' has become the song dearest to his heart. The swinging rhythm of the tune and the homely directness of the words gave the song an instant popularity, increased by the

fact that it commemorated the most striking episode of the war, the march to the sea. 'Marching through Georgia' was written and composed by the late Henry C. Work. In his history of 'Music in America,' Professor Ritter refers to Stephen C. Foster, the composer of 'Old Folks at Home,' as one who "said naively and gently what he had to say, without false pretension or bombastic phrases"; and this praise may be applied also to Work, who had not a little of the folk-flavor which gives quality to Foster. Like Foster, Work was fond of reflecting the rude negro rhythms; and some of his best songs seem like actual echoes from the cotton-field and levee. 'Wake, Nicodemus,' 'Kingdom Coming,' and 'Babylon is Fallen' have this savor of the soil,— sophisticated, it may be, and yet pungent and captivating. I have heard it suggested that 'Marching through Georgia' was founded on a negro air, and also that it is a reminiscence of a bit of the 'Rataplan' of the 'Huguenots.' It is possible that there is a little truth at the bottom of both of these stories. The 'Huguenots' was frequently performed at the New Orleans Opera House before the war, and many a slave must have heard his young mistress singing and playing selections from Meyerbeer's music; and it may be that Work, in turn, overheard some negro's ram-

bling recollection of the 'Rataplan.' This is idle conjecture, however; the tune of 'Marching through Georgia' is fresh and spirited; and it bids fair — with 'John Brown's Body' — to be the chief legacy of the war. Work was also the author and composer of two other songs which had their day, 'Drafted into the Army' and 'Brave Boys are They.' The latter has had the honor of being sung of late by Mr. Cable, who heard first at a Southern camp-fire from the lips of a comrade the chorus of Northern origin, equally apt in its application in those troublous times to the homes on either side of Mason and Dixon's line:

> Brave boys are they,
> Gone at their country's call;
> And yet — and yet we cannot forget
> That many brave boys must fall.

It was in the dark days of 1862, just after Lincoln had issued the proclamation asking for three hundred thousand volunteers to fill up the stricken ranks of the army and to carry out the cry which urged it 'On to Richmond,' that Mr. John S. Gibbons wrote

> We are coming, Father Abraham,
> Three hundred thousand more,

a lyric which contributed not a little to the bring-

ing about of the uprising it declared. The author of this ringing call to arms was a member of the Society of Friends,—in other words, a Hicksite Quaker,—"with a reasonable leaning, however, toward wrath in cases of emergency," as his son-in-law, Mr. James H. Morse, neatly put it, in a recent letter to me. He joined the abolition movement in 1830, when he was barely twenty years old. Three years later he married a daughter of Isaac T. Hopper, the Quaker philanthropist. For a short time he was one of the editors of the *Anti-Slavery Standard*, and like many of the Quakers of his school, he was always ardent in the cause of negro freedom. At the outbreak of the war, Mrs. Gibbons and her eldest daughter went to the front, and they served in the hospitals until the end. While they were away the riots of '63 occurred, and their house in New-York was sacked, Mr. Gibbons and the two younger daughters taking refuge with relatives in the house next door but one, and thence over the roofs to Eighth Avenue, where Mr. Joseph H. Choate had a carriage in waiting for them. The house was singled out for this attention because it had been illuminated when the Emancipation Proclamation was issued,—on which occasion it had been daubed and defiled with coal tar.

At the request of Mr. Morse, Mr. Gibbons has put on paper an account of the circumstances under which he wrote 'We are coming, Father Abraham,' and from this I am privileged to quote. It must be premised that Mr. Gibbons, although he had written verse,—as who has not?—was best known as a writer on economic topics: he has published two books about banking and he was for a while the financial editor of the *Evening Post*. In 1862, after Lincoln had issued his call for volunteers, Mr. Gibbons used to take long walks alone, often talking to himself. "I began to con over a song," he writes. "The words seemed to fall into ranks and files, and to come with a measured step. Directly would come along a company of soldiers with fife and drum, and that helped the matter amazingly. I began to keep step myself—three hun-dred thousand more. It was very natural to answer the President's call—we are coming—and to prefix the term *father*. Then the line would follow.

We are coming, Father Abraham,

and nothing was more natural than the number of soldiers wanted.

Three hundred thousand more.
We are coming, Father Abraham, three hundred thousand more.

"Where from? *Shore* is the rhyme wanted." Just then Mr. Gibbons met "a western regiment—from Minnesota, it was—and the line came at once in full,

From Mississippi's winding stream, and from New England's shore.

"Two lines in full . . . Then followed—how naturally!

We leave our ploughs and workshops, our wives and children dear,
With hearts too full for utterance, with but a silent tear.

"And so it went on, word by word, line by line, until the whole song was made." When it was written, only one slight verbal alteration was made, and then it was printed in the *Evening Post* of July 16, 1862. It is interesting to note that it was in the *Evening Post* of May 29, 1819, nearly half a century before, that another famous patriotic poem had first been published—Drake's 'American Flag.' Mr. Gibbons's song appeared anonymously and its authorship was ascribed at once to Bryant, who was then the editor of the *Evening Post*. At a large meeting in Boston, held the evening after it had appeared, it was read by Josiah Quincy as "the latest poem written by Mr. Wm. C. Bryant."

One of the Hutchinson family set it to music, and they sang it with great effect. A common friend told Jesse Hutchinson that the song was not by Bryant but by Mr. Gibbons. "What—our old friend Gibbons?" he asked in reply. It is reported that when he was assured that his old friend Gibbons was the real author of the song, Jesse Hutchinson hesitated thoughtfully for a moment and then said, "Well, we'll keep the name of Bryant, as we've got it. He's better known than Gibbons." The stirring song was set to music by several other composers, most of whom probably supposed that it was Bryant's. I find in a stray newspaper cutting an account of Lincoln's coming down to the Red Room of the White House one morning in the summer of 1864, to listen with bowed head and patient, pensive eyes while one of a party of visitors sang

> We are coming, Father Abraham, three hundred thousand more.

A rattling good war song which has kept its hold on the ears of the people is 'When Johnny comes Marching Home,' published in 1863 by "Louis Lambert." Behind this pseudonym was hidden Mr. P. S. Gilmore, the projector of the Boston "Peace Jubilee," and the composer after-

ward of a more ambitious national hymn, which has hitherto failed to attain the popularity of its unpretending predecessor with the rousing refrain. It is related that after the performance of 'Glory to God on High,' from Mozart's Twelfth Mass, on the first day of the Jubilee, an old soldier of the Webster regiment took occasion to shake hands with Mr. Gilmore and to proffer his congratulations on the success of the undertaking, adding that for his part what he had liked best was the piece called the 'Twelfth Massachusetts.'

At the Boston Peace Jubilee, and again at the Centennial Exhibition, there was opportunity for the adequate and serious treatment of the war tunes which have survived the welter and turmoil of the actual struggle; but the occasion was not improved. Little more has been done than a chance arrangement of airs in the clap-trap manner of Jullien's 'British Army Quadrilles.' The 'Centennial March' which Richard Wagner wrote for us was the work of a master, no doubt, but it was perfunctory, and hopelessly inferior to his resplendent 'Kaiser March.' The German composer had not touch of the American people, and as he did not know what was in our hearts, we had no right to hope that he should give it expression. The time is now ripe for the musician who shall richly and

amply develop with sustained and sonorous dignity the few simple airs which represent and recall to the people of these United States the emotions, the doubts, the dangers, the joys, the sorrows, the harassing anxieties, and the final triumph of the four long years of bitter strife. The composer who will take 'John Brown's Body' and 'Marching through Georgia,' and such other of our war tunes as may be found worthy, and who shall do unto them as the still living Hungarian and Scandinavian composers have done to the folk-songs of their native land, need not hesitate from poverty of material or from fear of the lack of a responsive audience. The first American composer who shall turn these war tunes into mighty music to commemorate the events which called them forth, will of a certainty have his reward.

(1887)

VIII

ON THE FRENCH SPOKEN BY THOSE WHO DO NOT SPEAK FRENCH

ON THE FRENCH SPOKEN BY THOSE WHO DO NOT SPEAK FRENCH.

HAVE always thought it a great pity that Thackeray did not leave us a Roundabout Paper 'On the French spoken by those who do not speak French.' No one is so competent and so capable of doing justice to the topic as Thackeray. It is a subject which seems most suitable for the author of the 'Book of Snobs'; for, above all things, is there snobbishness in the affectation of being on speaking terms with the French language, when in very truth it barely returns your bow. The title of the proposed paper is perhaps a little long; but there is wealth enough of material to warrant an article as ample as the name may promise. Indeed, the title is almost too comprehensive, for it includes the blunders of those who know they cannot speak French, but nevertheless try to make themselves understood, and the errors of those who insist in thinking that they

can speak French in spite of oral testimony which convinces every one else. And it would also include certain extraordinary phrases which pass for French in ordinary English speech.

The first of these classes is the French of Stratford-at-Bow, the French of the Hoosier or the Cockney, the French of those who affectionately refer to the capital of France as "Parry"—as though it were an Arctic explorer; there are even those, I am told, who descend so low as "Parree," because, mayhap, like *Mrs. General Gilflory,* they "have been so long abroad." At this type the French themselves never tire of poking fun. In caricature, pictorial or dramatic, it is an endless source of amusement; and the seeker for illustrative anecdote has an abundance to choose from. One of the most amusing is a dialogue between a Cockney passenger, who has full belief in the purity of his French, and the conductor of a diligence. The Cockney begins by calling the coachman a pig—and, indeed, *cocher* is not so very unlike *cochon.* Then he addresses himself to the conductor:

"Etes-vous le diligence?"

"Non, m'sieur, je suis le conducteur."

"C'est tout le même chose. Donnez-moa doux places dans votre interieur."

Unable to get inside seats, he tries to mount to the roof. Unfortunately, he slips and falls heavily to the ground. The conductor runs to his assistance.

"Avez-vous de mal, m'sieur?"

"No, moa pas de malle, moa only a portmanteau."

Here the blunderer was English; but in another narrative it seems to me that the fault lies rather with the Frenchman. An Anglo-Saxon was travelling in the south of France, and once, as the train into the station drew, he asked an attendant:

"Est-ce que c'est içi Hyères?"

Unfortunately, he pronounced the name of the town as though it were written *hier;* and so he received the puzzled answer:

"Mais non, m'sieur, c'est içi aujourd'hui."

Of honest blundering in the use of the foreign tongue, and of frank ignorance, there is no lack of anecdotes. The young lady brought up in an establishment where "French is the language of the school" is not always above asking "qu'elle est la matière?" and telling you that "il n'y a pas de dépêche," when she means to inquire what may be the matter, and to inform you that there is no hurry. I believe that Americans pick up French more quickly than do the English; but when

one seeks for typical blunders of beginners and of pretenders, honors are easy. It was a young American who asked for "*café au lait* without any milk," and who alluded to "*gendre* pictures," and who described a dress as "trimmed all down the front with *bouillon* fringe." But internal evidence compels me to assign to an Englishman the part of the protagonist in two merry jests of this sort. In one he says, "Je veux un poitrine de caleçons," and it is discovered that he had dug out from the dictionary this translation of "chest of drawers." In the other the scene is laid on a channel steamer, and as this thrusts its nose into the chopping sea, an English bagman calls frantically for the steward, adding, "Je sens mauvais. Où est ma naissance?" I have been told that he supposed he was saying the French equivalent for "I feel bad. Where is my berth?"

An American again, and a rigid Republican, is the hero of another anecdote. He met the German king who has won fame in the study of Dante, and he told his majesty that he was pleased to meet him. He parted from the royal scholar with the remark, "Je vous honore pas comme roi mais comme écolier!" It is a strange sight to see two Anglo-Saxon strangers meet and "terrify each other into mutual unintelligibility with that *lingua*

franca of the English-speaking traveller, which is supposed to bear some remote affinity to the French language, of which both parties are as ignorant as an American ambassador "—as Mr. Lowell wrote in his 'Fireside Travels,' not foreseeing the time when the scholar in politics should be minister at Madrid and London.

When Dr. Holmes acted as a medium and materialized the sturdy spectre of Dr. Johnson, the earlier autocrat declared to the later that "to trifle with the vocabulary, which is the vehicle of social intercourse, is to tamper with the currency of human intelligence"; and the orotund presence added the characteristic sentiment that in his opinion "he who would violate the sanctities of his mother-tongue would invade the recesses of the paternal till without remorse, and repeat the banquet of Saturn without indigestion." From the context we learn that just then the spirit of the great lexicographer had been perturbed by certain trifling puns or verbal witticisms with which the breakfast-table had been amused; but his ponderous criticism has always seemed to me to be quite as applicable to the ill-advised speakers and writers who find the English language inadequate to the full expression of their teeming thoughts, and who are therefore forced to filch phrases from foreign tongues.

The habit of dropping into French, for example, is as enfeebling as the habit of punning; and the one is quite as fairly to be considered a violation of the sanctities of the mother-tongue as the other. Either habit indicates a certain flabbiness of fibre, intellectual as well as ethical. It is difficult to believe either in the moral rectitude or in the mental strength of a man or of a woman addicted to the quoting of odd scraps of odd French. When we take up the latest work of a young-lady-novelist, and when we find scattered through her pages *soubriquet,* and *double-entendre,* and *nom de plume,* and *à l'outrance,* and other words and phrases which no Frenchman knows, we need not read further to be sure that the mantle of Jane Austen and George Eliot has not fallen on the shoulders of the fair author. Even Mrs. Oliphant, a novelist who is old enough to know better, and who has delighted us all with her charming tales of truly English life, is wont to sprinkle French freely through her many volumes, not in her novels only, but even in her unnecessary memoir of Sheridan, whom she credits with *gaité du cœur*. In his 'Letter to Young Contributors,' Colonel Higginson gave sound advice to the literary tyro when suggesting that he should "avoid French as some of the fashionable novelists avoid English."

Has any one ever noted that there is a far greater fondness in England for French words and phrases than there is in America? Whether I am the discoverer or not, the fact seems to me to be beyond question. In the new Grand Hotel in London, which is supposed to be managed on the American plan, more or less, but which has a name borrowed from Paris, the very gorgeous dining-room is labeled *Salle à Manger*. In another English hotel I saw a sign on what we call the "elevator," and the English, with greater simplicity, term a "lift," declaring it to be an *ascenseur*. The portable fire-extinguisher familiar to all Americans as a "Babcock," is in England called an *extincteur*. On the programmes of the itinerant opera company managed by Mr. Mapleson, and called, comically enough, Her Majesty's Opera, the wig-maker and costumer appear as the *perruquier* and the *costumier*. In the window of a shop in Regent Street, toward the end of the season, I saw exposed for sale a handsome china tea-service in a handsome silk-lined box, bearing in its cover two little placards, that to the right declaring that it was suitable for A Wedding Present, while that on the left suggested its fitness as *Un Présent De Noces*. In another English shop I have seen a heap of napkins surmounted by a placard setting forth the

price of these *serviettes*, and not far off was a pile of oddly named *serviette*-rings. But perhaps this is not more painful than a sign still to be seen in New Bond Street, declaring that the house to which it is affixed is occupied by "Blank et Cie., Artistes in Corsets." This, in the language of the wild Western humorist after he had been to Paris, *frappe tout chose parfaitement froid!*

Of course it cannot be denied that certain French words (and not those only which came over with the Conqueror) have fairly won a right of domicile in England. *Ennui*, for example, and *pique*—these have no exact English equivalents, and their removal from common speech would leave an aching void. (To *dénouement* I shall recur later.) But why should we speak of an *employé* when the regularly formed "employee" is at our service? And what evil spirit possesses Mrs. Tompkins, the London milliner, and Miss Simkins, the London dressmaker, to emblazon their golden signs with the mystic "Mdme. Tompkins, Modes," and "Mdlle. Simkins, Robes"? And here occasion serves to protest, with whatever strength may in me lie, against the superfluous *d* which British custom has injected into the French contractions for *Madame* and *Mademoiselle*. We say British, for this error is confined to Great Britain and her co-

lonial dependencies, the inhabitants of the United States of America having happily escaped it. In America, as in France, *Madame* and *Mademoiselle* are contracted to *Mme.* and *Mlle.*, and it is only the Briton who writes *Mdme.* and *Mdlle.*, in the fond belief that he has caught the exact Parisian touch. I venture to hint also that even after a French word has been admitted into the English language, the Englishman is inclined to recall its foreign origin in pronouncing it, while the American treats it frankly as an English word. Thus *charade* has nearly the same sound in the mouth of an educated Englishman that it has in the mouth of a Frenchman, whereas it falls from the lips of an American as a perfect rhyme for "made." And in like manner *trait* retains its French pronunciation in Great Britain, while in the United States it is spoken as it is spelt—to rhyme with "strait." The pun in the title of Dr. Doran's 'Table Traits, with something on them,' wholly evades an American unfamiliar with the British usage. But the American who girds at this English peculiarity must remember that he has heard his fellow-citizens call a *menu* a "maynew," and a *début* a "debyou"; and that some of them are in doubt whether *dépôt* ought to rhyme happily with "Aleppo," or haply with "teapot," and there-

fore compromise illogically by rhyming it with "sweep oh!"

To the ignorant and affected misuse of French or quasi-French, there is another kind of snobbishness closely akin and deserving castigation as severe. It is the use of the native name of a place, or worse yet, of the French name, instead of the English. What sort of figure would be cut by a returned traveller who described his journeys and his sojournings in *Italia* and *Deutschland?* Is it not as bad to speak of Mainz? and worse still, of Mayence?—when there is an honest English name, Mentz, inscribed in a hundred lusty chronicles of illustrious wars? And how often do we hear ladies talk of Malines lace, meaning the while the lace made at Mechlin,—for the town is Dutch, although the French have chosen to give it a name of their own fashioning, as they have also to Mentz and many another city.

It may be as well to note that the French phrase is *à outrance,* that there is no *u* in *sobriquet,* and that the French know no such expression as *nom de plume* or *double-entendre,* the nearest approach to the one being *nom de guerre* and to the other *double entente,* a double meaning, which is, however, wholly devoid of the ulterior significance attached to *double-entendre.* Perhaps the word most sinned

against is *artiste*. There is really no excuse whatever for the use of this word in English speech. It is the exact translation and complete equivalent of the English word *artist*, and it does not mean a female artist any more than *pianiste* means a female pianist. I can now recall with a shudder a programme thrust into my hand at a watering-place two or three years ago, in which a certain charming artist was announced as "the greatest living lady pianiste in the world." *Encore*, although used in English in a sense wholly different from that which it has in French, has now taken out its naturalization papers; and so has a hybrid word *parquette* used in America to indicate what the English call the stalls or orchestra chairs.

But on the stage, or rather in writings for and of and about the stage, there is an enormous consumption of French phrases, or of phrases fondly supposed to be French. The dramatic critic is wont to refer to the *rentrée* of an old favorite when he means his or her reappearance; and he comments on the skilful way in which M. Sardou brings about his *dénoûment*,— and for this there is perhaps some excuse, as there is no English word which is the exact technical equivalent of dénoûment. But he will record the attempting of a new *rôle* by the *ingénue*, and he will congratulate that

clever *comédienne* on the enlarging of her *repertoire*. To him the "juvenile lead" is a *jeune premier* and the tragic actress is a *tragédienne* educated at the *conservatoire*. In his eyes a ballet-dancer is a *danseuse*, and in his ears the comic singer sings a *chansonnette*. There is really no reason for this frequent French; and although the vocabulary of the dramatic critic is overworked, with a little care he may avoid tautology by less violent means.

Over the door of a free-and-easy or cheap concert-saloon near Union Square I have seen a transparency announcing that the place was a "Resorté Musicale." And in a theatrical weekly paper I discovered once an advertisement even more remarkable. I give it here as it stood, changing only the proper names:

ANNIE BLACK,

The popular favorite and Leading Lady of —— Theatre Comique, will be at liberty after June to engage for the season of '81-82, as Leading Lady with first-class comb. Also

E. J. BLACK,

(Née EDWARD BROWN,)

CHARACTER ACTOR.

Please read this carefully, and note the delightfully inappropriate use of *née*, and the purely professional cutting short into "comb." of the word

"combination," technically applied to strolling companies. Above all, pray remark the fact that the gray mare is the better horse, and that the man has given up his own name for his wife's.

It would not be fair thus to rebuke our fellow-countrymen without noting the fact that the French are nowadays quite as prone to quote English as the English are to quote French, and also that there is very little to choose between the results. An article on sport in a French paper is almost as curious and macaronic a medley as an article on the fashions in an English paper. Just as the technical phrases which hint at the mighty mysteries of ladies' apparel are all French, so the technical phrases of masculine outdoor amusement are nearly all English. The report of a horse-race as it appears in a Parisian newspaper is quite as comic as the description of a bride's gown as it appears in a London organ of society. The French dandy, who was once a *gandin,* and who is now a *gommeux,* is driven to the course in a *breack* drawn by a pair of *steppers;* on the track he mingles with the *betting-men* and makes a *book*. Thus he accomplishes his duty to society, and is acknowledged to be *tout ce qu'il y a de plus big-lif*. We are informed and believe that this strange perversion of "high life" is pronounced as it is written,

"hig-lif." When the French swell is not mingling with the other *sportmen* on the *turf,* he has perhaps gone to the river to see the *rovingmen,* or into some garden to watch the *jeunes misses* playing *crockett,* by which last word the French are wont to designate the formerly popular game of croquet. In the summer, or rather in the early autumn, he varies these amusements by a paper-chase of some unknown variety, which he complacently calls a *rallye-papier*.

To see just how far can go this absurd commingling of tongues, complicated by preternaturally ingenious blundering, one must give his days and nights to the reading of the 'Carnet d'un Mondain,' which the *Figaro* publishes under the signature of "Etincelle." To see how even clever and well-informed writers may err in bad company, one must read the always interesting and often instructive *chroniques* which M. Jules Claretie contributed every week to the *Temps,* and which were gathered together every year under the title of 'La Vie à Paris.' M. Claretie reads English, and he has travelled in England; but he makes repeated use of a hybrid verb—*interwiever,* which we assume to be some sort of a Gallicized interview. *Interwiever* is the act accomplished by the *reporter*—another word which the French

have snatched across the Channel. But *interwiever*, bad as it is, and absurd as it is, is not a whit worse or more absurd than *double-entendre* and *soubriquet*. In fact, the better one knows the popular misinformation on both sides of the Channel, the more willingly will one admit that honors are easy, and that English bad French is no better and no worse than French bad English.

Ten years ago M. Justin Amero put forth two little pamphlets full of the most amusing blunders of the Anglo-Frenchman and the Franco-Englishman. One, 'L'Anglomanie dans le français et les barbarismes anglais usités en France,' was intended to warn those of his fellow-countrymen who write "Times is money" in the belief that they are quoting Shakspere; and the other, 'French Gibberish,' a review showing how the French language is misused in England and in other English-speaking countries, was meant for those who write *coute qui coute* instead of *coute que coute*.

There is an ancient and musty jest about a city madam who spoke only the French habitually used in young ladies' schools, and who rendered into English the familiar *ris de veau à la financière* as "a smile of the little cow in the manner of the female financier." But this is not more startling than many other things to be discovered by those

who search the cook-books diligently. I remember a bill of fare in an American hotel in which all the familiar dishes were translated into unfamiliar French, the climax being reached when gingersnaps, the sole dessert, appeared transmogrified into *gateux de gingembre*. Perhaps it is in revenge for repeated insults like this that the Parisians now advertise on the windows of the cafés on the boulevards that *Boissons Américaines* are sold within, the only American drink particularized being a certain "Shery Gobbler," warranted to warm the heart of all vagrant American humorists who may chance to visit Paris while alive and in the flesh. In essence *shery gobbler* is but little more comic than *rosbif*, or than *bifteck*, which are recognized French forms of the roast beef of old England and of the beefsteak which plays second to it. Both *rosbif* and *bifteck* are accepted by Littré, who finds for the latter a sponsor as early and as eminent as Voltaire. And *shery gobbler* is not as comic as "cutlete" and "tartlete," which I detected day after day on the bill of fare of a Cunard steamer crossing from Liverpool to New-York three or four years ago. When I drew the attention of a fellow-traveller to the constant recurrence of the superfluous *e* at the end of cutlet and tartlet, the active and intelligent steward, who anticipated our slightest

wants, leant forward with a benignant smile, and benevolently explained the mystery. "It's the French, sir," he said; "cutlete and tartlete is French, sir!"

A bill of fare at the Grand Hotel in Paris, in 1885, offered "Irisch-stew à la française"—truly a marvellous dish. In a certain restaurant of the Palais Royal, however, there is a bi-lingual bill of fare which recalls the Portuguese 'Guide to Conversation,' if indeed it does not "break the record." In this we are proffered our choice of "barbue dutch manner" *(barbue à la Hollandaise)*, or "eel in tartar," or of "a sole at Colbert." We may have "beef at flamande" or "beef at mode" *(bœuf à la mode)*, or "beefsteack with haricots." The *cotelette sauté à la minute* appears as "one mutton chop at minute," and a *cotelette de chevreuil* appears as "a chops of kid" *(sic)*. We may order, if we will, a "fillet napolitan manner," or a "chicken at Marengo," or a "sweet bread at financière."

But quite the wildest linguistic freak which ever came within my ken is the following notice, copied years ago from the original as it hung on the walls of a cheap hotel in New-York frequented by the smaller theatrical people of all nationalities: "Messier et Médammes chaque Diners, soupés, etc., se que ont portez dan le chambres son chargait â par."

Of the many amusing stories in circulation and turning on an English misuse of French, the most popular is perhaps the anecdote in which one of two gentlemen occupying an apartment in Paris leaves word with the *concierge* that he does not wish his fire to go out; as he unfortunately expresses this desire in the phrase "ne laissez pas sortir le fou," much inconvenience results to the other gentleman, who is detained in the apartment as a dangerous lunatic. This pleasant tale has in its time been fathered on many famous Englishmen. And like unto it is another which Americans are wont to place to the credit of a Cockney, while the English are sure that its true hero was a Yankee—both parties acting on the old principle of "putting the Frenchman up the chimney when the tale is told in England." The story goes that a certain Anglo-Saxon—for thus I may avoid international complications—entered into a Parisian restaurant with intent to eat, drink, and be merry. Wishing to inform the waiter of his hunger he said, "J'ai une femme!" to which the polite but astonished waiter naturally responded, "J'espère que madame se porte bien?" Whereupon the Anglo-Saxon makes a second attempt at the French for hunger, and asserts, "Je suis fameux!" to which the waiter's obvious reply is,

"Je suis bien aise de le savoir, monsieur!" Then the Anglo-Saxon girded up his loins and made a final effort, and declared, "Je suis femme!" to which the waiter could answer only, "Alors madame s'habille d'une façon très-étrange." After which the Anglo-Saxon fled and was seen no more. This merry jest came to me by word of mouth and vouched for by an eye-witness; but I am told on good authority that it was used by the elder Charles Mathews in one of his At Homes at least half a century ago.

(1887)

IX

THE DRAMATIZATION OF NOVELS

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EW literary tasks seem easier of accomplishment than the making of a good play out of a good novel. The playwright has ready to his hand a story, a sequence of situations, a group of characters artfully contrasted, the suggestion of the requisite scenery, and occasional passages of appropriate conversation. What more is needed than a few sheets of paper and a pair of scissors, a pen and a little plodding patience? The pecuniary reward is abundant; apparently the feat is temptingly facile; and every year we see many writers succumb to the temptation. Whenever a novel hits the popular fancy and is seen for a season in everybody's hands, be it 'Mr. Barnes of New York' or 'She,' 'The Quick or the Dead?' or 'Robert Elsmere,' the adapter steps forward and sets the story on the stage, counting on the reflected reputation of the novel to attract the public to witness the play. But the result of the calculation is rarely satisfactory, and the dramatized

romance is rarely successful. Frequently it is an instant failure, like the recent perversion of 'Robert Elsmere'; occasionally it is forced into a fleeting popularity by managerial wiles, like the stage versions of 'She' and 'Mr. Barnes of New York'; and only now and again is it really welcomed by the public, like the dramatizations of 'Little Lord Fauntleroy' and 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' So it is that, if we look back along the lists of plays which have had prolonged popularity, we shall find the titles of very few dramatizations, and we shall discover that those which chance to linger in our memory are recalled chiefly because of a fortuitous association with the fame of a favorite actor; thus the semi-operatic version of 'Guy Mannering' brings before us Charlotte Cushman's weird embodiment of Meg Merrilies, just as the artless adaptation of the 'Gilded Age' evokes the joyous humor of John T. Raymond as Colonel Sellers. And if we were to make out a list of novels which have been adapted to the stage in the past thirty years or so, we should discover a rarely broken record of overwhelming disaster.

The reason of this is not far to seek. It is to be found in the fundamental difference between the art of the drama and the art of prose-fiction — a difference which the adapter has generally ignored or been ignorant of. Perhaps it is not unfair to

suggest that the methods of the dramatist and of the novelist are as unlike as the methods of the sculptor and of the painter. The difference between the play and the novel is at bottom the difference between a precise and rigid form, and a form of almost unlimited range and flexibility. The drama has laws as unbending as those of the sonnet, while the novel may extend itself to the full license of an epic. It is hardly too much to say that nowadays the novelist has complete freedom in choice of subject and in method of treatment. He may be concise or he may be prolix. He may lay the scene of his story in a desert, and find his effect in the slow analysis of a single human soul in awful solitude; or he may create a regiment of characters which shall perform intricate evolutions and move in serried ranks through the crowded streets of a busy city. He may riot in the great phenomena of nature, forcing the tornado, the gale at sea, the plunge of a cataract, the purple sunset after a midsummer storm, to create his catastrophe or to typify some mood of his hero. He may be a persistent pessimist, believing that all is for the worst in the worst of all possible worlds, and painting his fellow-man in harsh black-and-white, with a most moderate use of the white. He may be a philosopher, using a thin veil of fiction as a transparent mask for the exposition of his system

of life. He may adopt the novel as a platform or as a pulpit; he may use it as a means or he may accept it as an end; he may do with it what he will; and if he be a man to whom the world wishes to listen or a man who has really something to say, he gains a hearing.

In contrast with the license of the novelist the limitations of the dramatist were never more distinct than they are to-day. As the playwright appeals to the play-goer, he is confined to those subjects in which the broad public can be interested and to the treatment which the broad public will accept. While the writer of romance may condense his work into a short-story of a column or two, or expand it to a stout tome of a thousand pages, the writer for the stage has no such choice; his work must be bulky enough to last from half-past eight to half-past ten at the shortest, or at the longest from eight to eleven. In the present condition of the theatre in Great Britain and the United States, there is little or no demand for the comedietta or for the two-act comedy; a play must be long enough and strong enough to furnish forth the whole evening's entertainment. The dramatist may divide his piece into three, or four, or five acts, as he may prefer, but except from some good and sufficient reason, there must be but a single scene to each act. The characters must be so many in

number that no one shall seem unduly obtrusive; they must be sharply contrasted; most of them must be sympathetic to the spectators, for the audience in a theatre, however pessimistic it may be individually, is always optimistic as a whole. There must be an infusion of humor at recurrent intervals, and a slowly increasing intensity of emotional stress. In short, the fetters of the dramatist are as obvious as is the freedom of the novelist.

Perhaps the chief disadvantage under which the dramatist labors is that it is almost impossible for him to show adequately the progressive and well-nigh imperceptible disintegration of character under the attrition of recurring circumstance. Time and space are both beyond the control of the maker of plays, while the story-teller may take his hero by slow stages to the world's end. The drama has but five acts at most, and the theatre is but a few yards wide. Description is scarcely permissible in a play; and it may be the most beautiful and valuable part of a novel. Comment by the author is absolutely impossible on the stage; and there are many who love certain novels — Thackeray's for example — chiefly because they feel therein the personal presence of the author. It is at once the merit and the difficulty of dramatic art that the characters must reveal themselves; they must be illuminated from

within, not from without ; they must speak for themselves in unmistakable terms ; and the author cannot dissect them for us or lay bare their innermost thoughts with his pen as with a scalpel. The drama must needs be synthetic, while now the novel, more often than not, is analytic. The vocabulary of the playwright must be clear, succinct, precise, and picturesque, while that of the novelist may be archaic, fantastic, subtle, or allusive. Simplicity and directness are the ear-marks of a good play; but we all know good novels which are complex, involute, tortuous. A French critic has declared that the laws of the drama are Logic and Movement, by which he means that in a good play the subject clearly exposed at first moves forward by regular steps, artfully prepared, straight to its inevitable end.

After all, art is but a question of selection : no man can put the whole of life either on the stage or into a book. He must choose the facts which seem to him salient and which will best serve his purpose. He must reject unhesitatingly all the others, as valuable in themselves, it may be, but foreign to the work in hand. The principles differ which govern this selection by the dramatist and by the novelist. Details which are insignificant in a story may be of the greatest value in a play ; and effects of prime importance in the tale may be

contrary to the practice of the playwright, or even physically impossible on the stage. George Sand was a great novelist who was passionately occupied with the theatre, although she was wholly without the dramatic gift ; and in his biographical study of her career and her character the late M. Caro noted her constant failure as a dramatist, both with original plays and with adaptations of her own novels, declaring in these words the reason of this failure : "What is needed on the stage is the art of relief, the instinct of perspective, adroitness of combination, and, above all, action, again action, and always action. It is natural and laughter-forcing gaiety, or the secret of powerful emotion, or the unexpectedness which grips the attention"—all qualities which George Sand lacked.

A mere sequence of *tableaux vivants*, even if it include the characters and present the situations of a successful tale, is not necessarily a successful play, and certainly it is not a good play. It is easy enough to scissor a panorama of scenes from a story, but to make over the story itself into a play is not so easy. To get a true play out of a novel, the dramatist must translate the essential idea from the terms of narrative into the terms of the drama. He must disengage the fundamental subject from the accidental incidents with which

the novelist has presented it. He must strip it to the skeleton, and then he must clothe these bare bones with new flesh and fresh muscle in accordance with the needs of the theatre. He must disentangle the primary action, and set this on the stage clearly and simply. To do this it may be necessary to modify characters, to alter the sequence of scenes, to simplify motives, to condense, to clarify, to heighten. The more famous the novel — one might almost say the better the novel — the less likely is it to make a good play, because there is then a greater difficulty in disengaging the main theme from its subsidiary developments; and even when the playwright understands his trade, and realizes the gulf which yawns between the novel and the drama, the temptation to retain this fine scene of the story, or that delicately drawn character, or the other striking episode, is often too strong to be overcome, though he knows full well that these things are alien to the real play as it ought to be. The playwright is conscious that the play-goers may look for these unessential scenes and characters and episodes, and he yields despite his judgment. Then in the end the play becomes a mere series of magic-lantern slides to illustrate the book; the real and the essential disappear behind the accidental and incidental; and the spectator cannot

see the forest for the trees. The dramatizations of Scott, of Cooper, and of Dickens, whatever their temporary popularity might be, and their immediate pecuniary success, were none of them good plays, nor were they ever wholly satisfactory to those who knew and loved the original novels. And Scott, Cooper, and Dickens are all sturdy and robust story-tellers, whose tales, one would think, might readily lend themselves to the free-hand treatment and distemper illumination of the theatre. And 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' has had much the same fate on the stage; the rough-hewn dramas made out of it have succeeded by no art of their own, but because of the overwhelming interest of the novel. I know of no stage version of Mrs. Stowe's story, or of any novel of Scott, of Cooper, or of Dickens, which has either organic unity or artistic symmetry.

The finer the novel, the more delicate and delightful its workmanship, the more subtle its psychology, the greater is the difficulty in dramatizing it, and the greater the ensuing disappointment. The frequent attempts to turn into a play 'Vanity Fair' and the 'Scarlet Letter' were all doomed to the certainty of failure, because the development of the central character and the leading motives, as we see them in the pages of the novelist, are not those by which they would best

be revealed before the footlights. A true dramatist might treat dramatically the chief figures of Thackeray's novel or of Hawthorne's romance. I can conceive a Becky Sharp play and an Arthur Dimmesdale drama—the first a comedy, with underlying emotion ; and the second a tragedy, noble in its simple dignity : but neither of these possible plays would be in any strict sense of the word dramatized from the novel, although the germinant suggestion was derived from Thackeray and from Hawthorne. They would be original plays, independent in form, in treatment, and in movement ; much as 'All for Her' is an original play by Messrs. Simpson and Merivale, though it was obviously suggested by the essential ideas of 'Henry Esmond' and 'A Tale of Two Cities,' which were adroitly combined by two accomplished playwrights feeling themselves at liberty to develop their theme without any sense of responsibility to the novelists. In like manner Mr. Boucicault's admirably effective dramas, the 'Colleen Bawn' and the 'Long Strike,' are founded, one on the 'Collegians' of Gerald Griffin, and the other on Mrs. Gaskell's 'Mary Barton'; but the dramatist, while availing himself freely of the novelist's labors, held himself equally free to borrow from them no more than he saw fit, and felt in nowise bound to preserve in the play what

did not suit him in the story. I am told that the foundation of Lord Lytton's 'Richelieu' can be discovered in a romance by G. P. R. James ; and I have heard that a little story by Jules Sandeau was the exciting cause of MM. Sandeau and Augier's 'Gendre de M. Poirier,' the finest comedy of our century. At all times have playwrights been prone to take a ready-made myth. The great Greeks did it, using Homer as a quarry from which to get the rough blocks of marble needed for their heroic statues; while Shakspere found material for more than one piece in contemporary prose-fiction. But it would be absurd to consider any of these plays as a mere dramatization of a novel.

The difficulties and disadvantages of trying to make a play out of a popular tale, when the sequence and development of the story must be retained in the drama, are so distinctly recognized by novelists who happen also to be dramatists, that they are prone to stand aside and to leave the doubtful task to others. Dumas did not himself make a play out of his romantic tale, the 'Corsican Brothers.' And in the fall of 1887 there were produced in Paris two adaptations of successful novels which had been written by accomplished dramatists, 'L'Abbé Constantin,' by M. Ludovic Halévy, and 'L'Affaire Clémenceau,' by M. Alex-

andre Dumas *fils;* and in neither case did the dramatist adapt his own story. He knew better; he knew that the good novel would not make a good play ; and while the novice rushed in where the expert feared to tread, the original author stood aside, ready to take the profit, but not to run the risk.

I trust that I have not suggested that there are no novels which it is profitable or advisable to adapt to the stage. Such was not my intent, at least. What I wished to point out was that a panorama was not a play ; that to make a play out of a novel properly was a most difficult task ; and that the more widely popular the story, the less likely was the resultant piece to be valuable, because of the greater pressure to retain scenes foreign to the main theme as necessarily simplified and strengthened for the theatre.

Sometimes a story is readily set on the stage, because it was planned for the theatre before it appeared as a book. M. Georges Ohnet's 'Serge Panine,' for example, was first written as a play and afterward as a novel, although the piece was not performed until after the story had achieved success. Charles Reade's 'Peg Woffington' is avowedly founded on the comedy of 'Masks and Faces,' which Reade had written in collaboration with Tom Taylor, and of which it may seem to

be a dramatization. Reade also found it easy to make an effective play out of his 'Never Too Late to Mend,' because this novel was itself based on 'Gold,' an earlier piece of his.

Nor is this *ex-post-facto* dramatization the only possible or proper adaptation of a novel. A story of straightforward emotion may often be set on the stage to advantage, and with less alteration than is demanded by the more complex novel of character. Mr. R. L. Stevenson declares that "a good serious play must be founded on one of the passionate *cruces* of life, where duty and inclination come nobly to the grapple ; and the same is true of what I call, for that reason, the dramatic novel." Now it is this dramatic novel, handling broadly a pregnant emotion, which can most often be dramatized successfully and satisfactorily. And yet, even then, the story is perhaps best set on the stage by a playwright who has never read it. This may sound like a paradox, but I can readily explain what I mean. A well-known French piece, 'Miss Multon,' is obviously founded on the English novel 'East Lynne.' I once asked M. Eugène Nus, one of the authors of 'Miss Multon,' how he came to adapt an English book ; and he laughingly answered that neither he nor his collaborator, M. Adolphe Bélot, had ever read 'East Lynne.' At a pause during a

rehearsal of another play of theirs, an actress had told M. Bélot that she had just finished a story which would make an excellent play, and thereupon she gave him the plot of Mrs. Wood's novel. And the plot, the primary suggestion, the first nucleus of situation and character, this is all these dramatists needed ; and in most cases it is all that the dramatist ought to borrow from the novelist. It is thus that we may account in part for the merit of Mr. Pinero's play the 'Squire,' which is perhaps more or less remotely derived from Mr. Hardy's 'Far from the Madding Crowd.' Not to have read the story he is to dramatize is, however, a privilege possible to but few playwrights.

The next best thing is to have the needful power to disengage the main theme of the story and to be able to reincarnate this in a dramatic body. A good example may be seen in 'Esmeralda,' the comedy which Mr. William Gillette helped Mrs. Burnett to make out of a tale of hers. But this has been done so rarely on the English-speaking stage that I must perforce seek other examples in France. As it happens, I can name three plays, all founded on novels, all adapted to the stage by the novelist himself, and all really superior to the novels from which they were taken. M. Jules Sandeau's 'Mademoiselle de la

Seiglière' is a pretty tale, but the comedy which the late eminent comedian, M. Regnier of the Comédie-Française, aided M. Sandeau to found upon it is far finer as a work of literature. 'Le Marquis de Villemer' of George Sand is a lovely novel, but it lacks the firmness, the force, and the symmetry to be found in the play which M. Alexandre Dumas *fils* helped her to construct from it, and which, therefore, won the popular favor denied to most of her other dramatic attempts. And in like manner M. Dumas himself recomposed his 'Dame aux Camélias,' and made a moving novel into one of the most moving plays of our time. In all three cases the drama is widely different from the story, and the many needful modifications have been made with marvellous technical skill. Hardly any more profitable investigation could be suggested to the prentice playwright than first to read one of these novels, and then to compare it faithfully with the play which its author evolved from it ; and the student of the physics of playmaking could have no better laboratory work than to think out the reasons for every change.

Such a student will discover, for instance, that the dramatist cannot avail himself of one of the most effective devices of the novelist, who may keep a secret from his readers, which is either revealed to them unexpectedly and all at once,

or which they are allowed to solve for themselves from chance hints skilfully let fall in the course of the narrative. But the dramatist knows that to keep a secret from the spectator for the sake of a single sudden surprise is to sacrifice to one little and temporary shock of discovery the cumulative force of a heroic struggle against a foreseen catastrophe. To take an example from one of the most accomplished of Greek playwrights, the strife against awakening doubt, the wrestling with a growing conviction, the agony of final knowledge which we see in 'Œdipus,' and the indisputable effect these have on us, are the result of not keeping a secret. The great play of Sophocles has the interest of expectation, though every spectator might foresee and foretell the outcome of the opening situations. True dramatic interest is aroused, not by deceiving or disappointing the audience as to the end to be reached, or even by keeping it unduly in doubt as to this, but by choosing the least commonplace and most effective means of reaching that end. And true dramatic interest is sustained, not by a vulgar surprise, but by exciting the sympathy of the spectator for the character immeshed in dangers which the audience comprehend clearly — by exciting the sympathy of the spectator so that he becomes the accomplice of the playwright, putting

himself in the place of the persons of the play, and feeling with them as the dread catastrophe draws nigh.

The novelist may play tricks with his readers, because he knows that they can take time to think if they are in doubt, and can even turn back a chapter or two to straighten out the sequence of events. But the dramatist knows that the spectators have no time for retrospection and for piecing together, and therefore he is not warranted in leaving them in the dark for a minute. And it is this total divergence of principle that so many novelists, and so many of those who attempt to dramatize novels, absolutely fail to apprehend. In her needless biography of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Mrs. Oliphant found fault with the screen scene of the 'School for Scandal' because we see Lady Teazle conceal herself. "It would, no doubt," she wrote, "have been higher art could the dramatist have deceived his audience as well as the personages of the play, and made us also parties in the surprise of the discovery." This criticism is simply a master stroke of dramatic incompetence, and it is astounding that any one able to read and write could consider that most marvelous specimen of dramatic construction, the screen scene of the 'School for Scandal,' without seeing that the whole effect of the

situation, and half the force of the things said and done by the characters on the stage, would be lost if we did not know that Lady Teazle was in hiding within hearing of Joseph's impotent explanations, Charles's careless gaiety, and Sir Peter's kindly thoughtfulness.

In a play there must be as little as possible of either confusion or doubt. As the French critic said, the laws of the drama are Logic and Movement — logic in the exposition and sequence of events, movement in the emotions presented. And here we come to another dissimilarity of the drama from prose-fiction — the need of more careful and elaborate structure in a play. A novel a man may make up as he goes along haphazard, but in a play the last word must be thought out before the first word is written. The plot must move forward unhesitatingly to its inevitable conclusion. There can be no wavering, no faltering, no lingering by the wayside. And every effect, every turn of the story, must be prepared adroitly and unostentatiously. M. Legouvé calls the play-goer both exacting and inconsistent, in that he insists that everything which passes before him on the stage shall be at once foretold and unforeseen. The play-goer is shocked if anything drops from the clouds unexpected, yet he is bored if anything is unduly announced. The dramatist must now

and again take the play-goers into his confidence by a chance word to which they pay no attention at the time, so that when the situation abruptly turns on itself, they say to themselves, "Why, of course; he warned us of that. What fools we were not to guess what was coming!" And then they are delighted.

In considering Lord Tennyson's 'Queen Mary' when it first appeared, Mr. Henry James remarked that the "fine thing in a real drama is that, more than any other work of literary art, it needs a masterly structure, a process which makes a demand upon an artist's rarest gifts." And then Mr. James compressed a chapter of criticism into a figure of speech. "The five-act drama," he said, "serious or humorous, poetic or prosaic, is like a box of fixed dimensions and inelastic material, into which a mass of precious things are to be packed away. . . . The precious things seem out of all proportion to the compass of the receptacle; but the artist has an assurance that with patience and skill a place may be made for each, and that nothing need be clipped or crimped, squeezed or damaged." It is this infinite patience and this surpassing skill that the ordinary theatrical adapter of a novel is wholly without. He does not acknowledge the duties of the dramatist, and he is hardly conscious even that a play is a

work of literary art. Few of those who try to write for the stage, without having penetrated the secret of the drama, realize the indisputable necessity of the preliminary plan. They do not suspect that a play must needs be built as carefully and as elaborately as a cathedral, in which not only the broad nave and the massive towers but every airy pinnacle and every flying buttress contribute to the total effect. As the architect, who is primarily an artist, must do his work in full accord with the needs of the civil engineer who understands the mechanics of building, so the dramatist, who deals with human character and human passion, is guided in his labor by the precepts and practice of the mere play-maker, the expert who is master of the mechanics of the stage. The accomplished architect is his own civil engineer, and the true dramatist is a playwright also, a man fully conversant with the possibilities of the theatre and fully recognizing its limitations. "To work successfully beneath a few grave, rigid laws," said Mr. James in the criticism from which I have already quoted, "is always a strong man's highest ideal of success." This serves to explain why the sonnet, with its inexorable rules, has been ever a favorite with great poets, and why the drama with its metes and bounds has always had a fascination for the literary artist.

Some of the limitations of the drama are inherent in the form itself, and are therefore immutable and permanent. Some are external, and are therefore temporary and variable. For example, it has always seemed to me that inadequate attention has been given to the influence exerted on dramatic literature by the size of the theatre and by the circumstances of the performance. This influence was most potent in shaping the Greek drama, the Elizabethan plays of England, and the French tragedy under Louis XIV. The unadorned directness of Æschylus impresses us mightily; the same massive breadth of treatment we find also, although in a minor degree, in Sophocles and Euripides: on all three dramatists it was imposed by the physical conditions of the theatre. Their plays were to be performed out of doors, by actors speaking through a resonant mouthpiece in a huge mask, and lifted on high shoes so that they might be seen by thousands of spectators from all classes of the people. Of necessity the dramatist chose for his subject a familiar tale, and gave it the utmost simplicity of plot, while he sought a gradually increasing intensity of emotion. The movement of his story must needs be slow; there was no change of scene, and there was no violence of action. Thus it happens that the impassable dignity of the Greek drama was due, not wholly to the

esthetic principles of Greek art, but to the physical conditions of the Greek theatre. The so-called rule of the three unities — the rule that a play should show but *one* action in *one* place and in *one* day, a rule that later critics deduced from the practice of the Greeks — was not consciously obeyed by Æschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides, although the most of their plays seem to fall within it, simply from force of circumstances.

As different as may be were the large and splendid open-air representations of these great Greek dramas before the assembled citizens of a Greek state, and the cramped and dingy performances of Shakspere's plays in the rude theatre of Queen Elizabeth's day, when the stage was but a small platform set up at one end of the half-roofed courtyard of an inn. Then there was but a handful of spectators, standing thickly in the pit or seated in the shallow galleries close to the actors. The stage was unencumbered with scenery, and author and actors felt themselves free to fill it with movement; and so the plays of that time abound in murders and trials, in councils and in battles. The audience had perforce to imagine the background of the story, and so the authors did not hesitate to change the scene with careless frequency. As the noble marble theatres of Greece imposed on the dramatist an equal severity, so the mean, half-

timbered playhouses of Elizabethan England warranted the noisy violence and the rushing eloquence and the fiery poesy which seem to us to-day chief among the characteristics of the dramatic literature of that epoch.

Crossing the Channel to France, we find that the decorum and pseudo-dignity of tragedy under Louis XIV. are due, in part at least, to the court plumes and velvet coats which the actors wore even when personating the noblest of Romans or the simplest of Greeks; and also to the fact that the stage was circumscribed by a double row of benches occupied by the courtiers. Through the ranks of these fine gentlemen, coming and going at their will, and chatting together freely, the Cid and Phèdre had to make their way to a small central space where they might stand stock-still to declaim. Swift motion and even vigorous gesture were impossible. The wily Racine found his account in substituting a subtle self-analytic and concentrated psychologic action for purely physical movement, a choice consonant to his genius. On the production of Voltaire's 'Sémiramis,' it is recorded that an usher had to break through the ring of spectators seated and standing on the stage, with a plaintive appeal that they would make way for the ghost of Ninus. Under conditions like these it is no wonder that

in time French tragedy stiffened into a parody of itself.

The physical conditions of the stage are different in every time and in every place; they are continually changing; but the true dramatist makes his work conform to them, consciously or unconsciously. The poet who is not a true dramatist seeks to model a modern drama on an ancient — a fundamental and fatal defect. The attempt of Voltaire to imitate Sophocles was foredoomed to failure. The endeavor of many later English poets to use the Shaksperian formula is equally futile. Mr. Stedman has shrewdly pointed out that Tennyson's 'Queen Mary' differs from the work of the Elizabethan dramatist in that it is the result of a "forced effort, while the models after which it is shaped were in their day an intuitive form of expression."

This forced effort is really due to a misunderstanding of the older dramatists. If Sophocles had lived in the days of Voltaire, he would have written in accordance with the physical conditions of the French theatre of that era. If Shakspere had lived in the days of Æschylus, he would have produced Greek plays of the most sublime simplicity. Were he alive now, we may be sure that he would not construct a piece in mimicry of the Elizabethan dramatists, as Lord Tennyson chose to do. He

would use the most modern form: and, incomparable craftsman as he was, he would bend to his bidding every modern improvement — music, costume, scenery, and lighting. Were Cæsar and Napoleon men of our time, they would not now fight with the short sword or the flint-lock, but with the Winchester and the Gatling.

This, I take it, is one of the chief characteristics of the true dramatist — that he sees at once when a form is outworn, and lets the dead past bury its dead; that he utilizes all the latest devices of the stage, while recognizing frankly and fully the limitations imposed by the physical conditions of the theatre. As I have already suggested, these limitations forbid not a few of the effects permissible to the novelist. No dramatist may open his story with a solitary horseman, as was once the fashion of fiction; nor can he show the hero casually rescuing the heroine from a prairie on fire, or from a slip into the rapids of Niagara; and he finds it impossible to get rid of the villain by throwing him under the wheels of a locomotive. Not only is the utilization of the forces of nature very difficult on the stage, and extremely doubtful, but the description of nature herself is out of place; and however expert the scene-painter, he cannot hope to vie with Victor Hugo or Hawthorne in calling up before the eye the grandeur or the picturesque-

ness of the scene where the action of the story comes to its climax.

Time was when the drama was first, and prose-fiction limped a long way after; time was when the novelists, even the greatest of them, began as playwrights. Cervantes, Le Sage, Fielding, all studied the art of character-drawing on the boards of a theatre, although no one of their plays keeps the stage to-day, while we still read with undiminished zest the humorous record of the adventures and misadventures of Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Tom Jones. Scott was, perhaps, the first great novelist who did not learn his trade behind the scenes. It seemed to Lowell that before Fielding "real life formed rather the scenic background than the substance, and that the characters are, after all, merely players who represent certain types rather than the living types themselves." It may be suggested that the earlier novels reflected the easy expedients and artificial manners of the theatre, much as the writers may have employed the processes of the stage. Since Fielding and Scott the novel has been expanding, until it seeks to overshadow its elder brother. The old interdependence of the drama and prose-fiction has ceased; nowadays the novel and the play are independent, each with its own aims and its own methods.

While, on the one hand, there are not lacking those who see in the modern novel but a bastard epic in low prose, so there are not wanting others, novelists and critics of literature, chiefly in France, where the principles of dramatic art are better understood than elsewhere, who are so impressed by the number and magnitude of the restrictions which bind the dramatist that they are inclined to declare the drama itself to be an outworn form. They think that the limitations imposed on the dramatist are so rigid that first-rate literary workmen will not accept them, and that first-rate literary work cannot be hoped for. These critics are on the verge of hinting that nowadays the drama is little more than a polite amusement, just as others might call oratory now little more than the art of making after-dinner speeches. They suggest that the play is sadly primitive when compared with the perfected novel of the nineteenth century. They remark that the drama can show but a corner of life, while prose-fiction may reveal almost the whole of it. They assert boldly that the drama is no longer the form of literature best suited to the treatment of the subjects in which the thinking people of to-day are interested. They declare that the novelist may grapple resolutely with a topic of the times, though the dramatist dare not scorch his fingers with a burning

question. The Goncourts, in the preface of their undramatic play, 'La Patrie en Danger,' announced that "the drama of to-day is not literature."

It is well to mass these criticisms together that they may be met once and for all. It is true that the taste for analysis which dominates the prose-fiction of our time has affected the drama but little; and it is not easy to say whether or not the formulas of the theatre can be so enlarged, modified, and made more delicate that the dramatist can really rival the novelist in psychologic subtlety. Of course, if the novel continues to develop in one direction in accordance with a general current of literature, and if the drama does not develop along the same lines, then the drama will be left behind, and it will become a mere sport, an empty spectacle, a toy for children, spoon-meat for babes.

A book, however fine or peculiar, delicate or spiritual, goes in time to the hundred or the thousand congenial spirits for whom it was intended; it may not get to its address at once or even in its author's lifetime; but sooner or later its message is delivered to all who are ready to receive it. A play can have no such fate; and for it there is no redemption, if once it is damned. It cannot live by pleasing a few only; to earn the right to exist, it must please the many. And this is at

the bottom of all dislike for the dramatic form — that it appeals to the crowd, to the broad public, to all classes alike, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, rough and refined. And this is to me the great merit of the drama, that it cannot be dilettante, finikin, precious, narrow. It must handle broad themes broadly. It must deal with the common facts of humanity. It is the democrat of literature. Théophile Gautier, who disliked the theatre, said that an idea never found its way on the stage until it was worn threadbare in newspapers and in novels. And he was not far out. As the drama appeals to the public at large, it must consider seriously only those subjects which the public at large can understand and are interested in. There are exceptions, no doubt, now and again, when an adroit dramatist succeeds in captivating the public with a theme still in debate. M. Sardou, for example, wrote 'Daniel Rochat' ten years before Mrs. Ward wrote 'Robert Elsmere,' and the Frenchman's play was acted in New York for more than a hundred nights. M. Alexandre Dumas *fils* has again and again discussed on the stage marriage and divorce and other problems that vex mankind to-day. And in Scandinavia, Henrik Ibsen, a dramatist of exceeding technical skill and abundant ethical vigor, has brought out a series of dramas (many of them

successful on the stage), of which the most important is 'Ghosts,' wherein he considers with awful moral force the doctrine of heredity, proving by example that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children. With instances like these in our memories, we may suggest that the literary deficiencies of the drama are not in the form, but in the inexpertness or inertness of the dramatists of the day. There are few of the corner-stone facts of human life, and there are none of the crucible-tried passions of human character, which the drama cannot discuss quite as well as the novel.

Indeed, the drama is really the noblest form of literature, because it is the most direct. It calls forth the highest of literary faculties in the highest degree — the creation of character, standing firm on its own feet, and speaking for itself. The person in a play must *be* and *do*, and the spectator must see what he is, and what he does, and why. There is no narrator standing by to act as chorus, and there needs none. If the dramatist know his trade, if he have the gift of the born playwright, if his play is well made, then there is no call for explanation or analysis, no necessity of dissecting or refining, no demand for comment or sermon, no desire that any one palliate or denounce what all have seen. Actions speak louder than words. That this direct dramatic method is fine enough

for the most abstruse intellectual self-questioning when the subject calls for this, and that in the mighty hand of genius it is capable of throwing light in the darkest corners and crannies of the tortured and tortuous human soul, ought not to be denied by any one who may have seen on the stage the 'Œdipus' of Sophocles, the 'Hamlet' of Shakspere, the 'Misanthrope' of Molière, or the 'Faust' of Goethe.

(1889)

X

THE WHOLE DUTY OF CRITICS

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"DOUBTLESS criticism was originally benignant, pointing out the beauties of a work rather than its defects. The passions of man have made it malignant, as the bad heart of Procrustes turned the bed, the symbol of repose, into an instrument of torture." So wrote Longfellow a-many years ago, thinking, it may be, on 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers,' or on the Jedburgh justice of Jeffrey. But we may question whether the poet did not unduly idealize the past, as is the custom of poets, and whether he did not unfairly asperse the present. With the general softening of manners, no doubt those of the critic have improved also. Surely, since a time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, "to criticise," in the ears of many, if not of most, has been synonymous with "to find fault." In Farquhar's 'Inconstant,' now nearly two hundred years old, Petit says of a certain lady: "She's a

critic, sir; she hates a jest, for fear it should please her."

The critics themselves are to blame for this misapprehension of their attitude. When Mr. Arthur Pendennis wrote reviews for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, he settled the poet's claims as though he "were my lord on the bench, and the author a miserable little suitor trembling before him." The critic of this sort acts not only as jury and judge, first finding the author guilty and then putting on the black cap to sentence him to the gallows, but he often volunteers as executioner also, laying on a round dozen lashes with his own hand and with a hearty good will. We are told, for example, that Captain Shandon knew the crack of Warrington's whip and the cut his thong left. Bludyer went to work like a butcher and mangled his subject, but Warrington finished a man, laying "his cuts neat and regular, straight down the back, and drawing blood every time."

Whenever I recall this picture I understand the protest of one of the most acute and subtle of American critics, who told me that he did not much mind what was said about his articles so long as they were not called "trenchant." Perhaps *trenchant* is the adjective which best defines what true criticism is not. True criticism, so Joubert tells us, is *un exercice méthodique de discerne-*

ment. It is an effort to understand and to explain. The true critic is no more an executioner than he is an assassin; he is rather a seer, sent forward to spy out the land, and most useful when he comes back bringing a good report and bearing a full cluster of grapes.

La critique sans bonté trouble le goût et empoisonne les saveurs, said Joubert again; unkindly criticism disturbs the taste and poisons the savor. No one of the great critics was unkindly. That Macaulay mercilessly flayed Montgomery is evidence, were any needed, that Macaulay was not one of the great critics. The tomahawk and the scalping-knife are not the critical apparatus, and they are not to be found in the armory of Lessing and of Sainte-Beuve, of Matthew Arnold and of James Russell Lowell. It is only incidentally that these devout students of letters find fault. Though they may ban now and again, they came to bless. They chose their subjects, for the most part, because they loved these, and were eager to praise them and to make plain to the world the reasons for their ardent affection. Whenever they might chance to see incompetence and pretension pushing to the front, they shrugged their shoulders more often than not, and passed by on the other side silently; and so best. Very rarely did they cross over to expose an impostor.

Lessing waged war upon theories of art, but he kept up no fight with individual authors. Sainte-Beuve sought to paint the portrait of the man as he was, warts and all; but he did not care for a sitter who was not worth the most loving art. Matthew Arnold was swift to find the joints in his opponent's armor; but there is hardly one of his essays in criticism which had not its exciting cause in his admiration for its subject. Lowell has not always hidden his scorn of a sham, and sometimes he has scourged it with a single sharp phrase. Generally, however, even the humbugs get off scot-free, for the true critic knows that Time will attend to these fellows, and there is rarely any need to lend a hand. It was Bentley who said that no man was ever written down save by himself.

The late Edmond Schérer once handled M. Émile Zola without gloves: and M. Jules Lemaître has made M. Georges Ohnet the target of his flashing wit. But each of these attacks attained notoriety from its unexpectedness. And what has been gained in either case? Since Schérer fell foul of him, M. Zola has written his strongest novel, 'Germinal' (one of the most powerful tales of this century), and his rankest story, 'La Terre' (one of the most offensive fictions in all the history of literature). M. Lemaître's brilliant assault on

M. Ohnet may well have excited pity for the wretched victim; and, damaging as it was, I doubt if its effect is as fatal as the gentler and more humorous criticism of M. Anatole France, in which the reader sees contempt slowly gaining the mastery over the honest critic's kindliness.

For all that he was a little prim in taste and a little arid in manner, Schérer had the gift of appreciation — the most precious possession of any critic. M. Lemaître, despite his frank enjoyment of his own skill in fence, has a faculty of hearty admiration. There are thirteen studies in the first series of his 'Contemporains,' and the dissection of the unfortunate M. Ohnet is the only one in which the critic does not handle his scalpel with loving care. To run amuck through the throng of one's fellow-craftsmen is not a sign of sanity — on the contrary. Depreciation is cheaper than appreciation; and criticism which is merely destructive is essentially inferior to criticism which is constructive. That he saw so little to praise is greatly against Poe's claim to be taken seriously as a critic; so is his violence of speech; and so also is the fact that those whom he lauded might be as little deserving of his eulogy as those whom he assailed were worthy of his condemnation. The habit of intemperate attack which grew on Poe is foreign to the serene calm of the higher criticism.

F. D. Maurice made the shrewd remark that the critics who take pleasure in cutting up mean books soon deteriorate themselves — subdued to that they work in. It may be needful, once in a way, to nail vermin to the barn door as a warning, and thus we may seek a reason for Macaulay's cruel treatment of Montgomery, and M. Lemaître's pitiless castigation of M. Ohnet. But in nine cases out of ten, or rather in ninety-nine out of a hundred, the attitude of the critic toward contemporary trash had best be one of absolute indifference, sure that Time will sift out what is good, and that Time winnows with unerring taste.

The duty of the critic, therefore, is to help the reader to "get the best," — in the old phrase of the dictionary-venders, — to choose it, to understand it, to enjoy it. To choose it, first of all; so must the critic dwell with delighted insistence upon the best books, drawing attention afresh to the old and discovering the new with alert vision. Neglect is the proper portion of the worthless books of the hour, whatever may be their vogue for the week or the month. It cannot be declared too frequently that temporary popularity is no sure test of real merit; else were 'Proverbial Philosophy,' the 'Light of Asia,' and the 'Epic of Hades' the foremost British poems since the decline of Robert Montgomery; else were the

'Lamplighter' (does any one read the 'Lamplighter' nowadays, I wonder?), 'Looking Backward,' and 'Mr. Barnes of New York' the typical American novels. No one can insist too often on the distinction between what is "good enough" for current consumption by a careless public, and what is really good, permanent, and secure. No one can declare with too much emphasis the difference between what is literature and what is not literature, nor the width of the gulf which separates them. A critic who has not an eye single to this distinction fails of his duty. Perhaps the best way to make the distinction plain to the reader is to persist in discussing what is vital and enduring, pointedly passing over what may happen to be accidentally popular.

Yet the critic mischooses who should shut himself up with the classics of all languages and in rapt contemplation of their beauties be blind to the best work of his own time. If criticism itself is to be seen of men, it must enter the arena and bear a hand in the combat. The books which have come down to us from our fathers and from our grandfathers are a blessed heritage, no doubt; but there are a few books of like value to be picked out of those which we of to-day shall pass along to our children and to our grandchildren. It may be even that some of our children are beginning

already to set down in black and white their impressions of life, with a skill and with a truth which shall in due season make them classics also. Sainte-Beuve asserted that the real triumph of the critic was when the poets whose praises he had sounded and for whom he had fought grew in stature and surpassed themselves, keeping, and more than keeping, the magnificent promises which the critic, as their sponsor in baptism, had made for them. Besides the criticism of the classics, grave, learned, definitive, there is another more alert, said Sainte-Beuve, more in touch with the spirit of the hour, more lightly equipped, it may be, and yet more willing to find answers for the questions of the day. This more vivacious criticism chooses its heroes and encompasses them about with its affection, using boldly the words "genius" and "glory," however much this may scandalize the lookers-on:

> Nous tiendrons, pour lutter dans l'arène lyrique,
> Toi la lance, moi les coursiers.

To few critics is it given to prophesy the lyric supremacy of a Victor Hugo — it was in a review of 'Les Feuilles d'Automne' that Sainte-Beuve made this declaration of principles. A critic lacking the insight and the equipment of Sainte-Beuve may unduly despise an Ugly Duckling, or he may

mistake a Goose for a Swan, only to wait in vain for its song. Indeed, to set out of malice prepense to discover a genius is but a wild-goose chase at best; and though the sport is pleasant for those who follow, it may be fatal to the chance fowl who is expected to lay a golden egg. Longfellow's assertion that "critics are sentinels in the grand army of letters, stationed at the corners of newspapers and reviews to challenge every new author," may not be altogether acceptable, but it is at least the duty of the soldier to make sure of the papers of those who seek to enlist in the garrison.

"British criticism has always been more or less parochial," said Lowell, many years ago, before he had been American Minister at St. James's. "It cannot quite persuade itself that truth is of immortal essence, totally independent of all assistance from quarterly journals or the British army and navy." No doubt there has been a decided improvement in the temper of British criticism since this was written; it is less parochial than it was, and it is perhaps now one of its faults that it affects a cosmopolitanism to which it does not attain. But even now an American of literary taste is simply staggered—there is no other word for it—whenever he reads the weekly reviews of contemporary fiction in the *Athenæum*, the *Academy*, the

Spectator, and the *Saturday Review*, and when he sees high praise bestowed on novels so poor that no American pirate imperils his salvation to reprint them. The encomiums bestowed, for example, upon such tales as those which are written by the ladies who call themselves "Rita," and "The Duchess" and "The Authoress of 'The House on the Marsh,'" seem hopelessly uncritical. The writers of most of these reviews are sadly lacking in literary perception and in literary perspective. The readers of these reviews — if they had no other sources of information — would never suspect that the novel of England is no longer what it was once, and that it is now inferior in art to the novel of France, of Spain, and of America. If the petty minnows are magnified thus, what lens will serve fitly to reproduce the lordly salmon or the stalwart tarpon? Those who praise the second-rate or the tenth-rate in terms appropriate only to the first-rate are derelict to the first duty of the critic — which is to help the reader to choose the best.

And the second duty of the critic is like unto the first. It is to help the reader to understand the best. There is many a book which needs to be made plain to him who runs as he reads, and it is the running reader of these hurried years that the critic must needs address. There are not a

few works of high merit (although none, perhaps, of the very highest) which gain by being explained, even as Philip expounded Esaias to the eunuch of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians, getting up into his chariot and guiding him. Perhaps it is paradoxical to suggest that a book of the very highest class is perforce clear beyond all need of commentary or exposition; but it is indisputable that familiarity may blur the outline and use may wear away the sharp edges, until we no longer see the masterpiece as distinctly as we might, nor do we regard it with the same interest. Here again the critic finds his opportunity; he may show the perennial freshness of that which seemed for a while withered; and he may interpret again the meaning of the message an old book may bring to a new generation. Sometimes this message is valuable and yet invisible from the outside, like the political pamphlets which were smuggled into the France of the Second Empire concealed in the hollow plaster busts of Napoleon III., but ready to the hand that knew how to extract them adroitly at the proper time.

The third duty of the critic, after aiding the reader to choose the best and to understand it, is to help him to enjoy it. This is possible only when the critic's own enjoyment is acute enough to be contagious. However well informed a critic

may be, and however keen he may be, if he be not capable of the cordial admiration which warms the heart, his criticism is wanting. A critic whose enthusiasm is not catching lacks the power of disseminating his opinions. His judgment may be excellent, but his influence remains negative. One torch may light many a fire; and how far a little candle throws its beams! Perhaps the ability to take an intense delight in another man's work, and the willingness to express this delight frankly and fully, are two of the characteristics of the true critic; of a certainty they are the characteristics most frequently absent in the criticaster. Consider how Sainte-Beuve and Matthew Arnold and Lowell have sung the praises of those whose poems delighted them. Note how Mr. Henry James and M. Jules Lemaître are affected by the talents of Alphonse Daudet and of Guy de Maupassant.

Having done his duty to the reader, the critic has done his full duty to the author also. It is to the people at large that the critic is under obligations, not to any individual. As he cannot take cognizance of a work of art, literary or dramatic, plastic or pictorial, until after it is wholly complete, his opinion can be of little benefit to the author. A work of art is finally finished when it comes before the public, and the instances are very few indeed when an author has ever thought it worth

while to modify the form in which it was first presented to the world. A work of science, on the other hand, depending partly on the exactness of the facts which it sets forth and on which it is founded, may gain from the suggested emendations of a critic. Many a history, many a law-book, many a scientific treatise, has been bettered in successive editions by hints gleaned here and there from the reviews of experts.

But the work of art stands on a wholly different footing from the work of science; and the critics have no further duty toward the author, except, of course, to treat him fairly, and to present him to the public if they deem him worthy of this honor. The novel or the poem being done once for all, it is hardly possible for critics to be of any use to the novelist or to the poet personally. The artist of experience makes up his mind to this, and accepts criticism as something which has little or nothing to do with his work, but which may materially affect his position before the public. Thackeray, who understood the feelings and the failings of the literary man as no one else, has shown us Mr. Arthur Pendennis reading the newspaper notices of his novel, 'Walter Lorraine,' and sending them home to his mother. "Their censure did not much affect him; for the good-natured young man was disposed to accept with consid-

erable humility the dispraise of others. Nor did their praise elate him overmuch; for, like most honest persons, he had his own opinion about his own performance, and when a critic praised him in the wrong place he was hurt rather than pleased by the compliment."

Mr. James tells us that the author of 'Smoke' and 'Fathers and Sons,' a far greater novelist than the author of 'Walter Lorraine,' had a serene indifference toward criticism. Turgenef gave Mr. James "the impression of thinking of criticism as most serious workers think of it — that it is the amusement, the exercise, the subsistence of the critic (and, so far as this goes, of immense use), but that, though it may often concern other readers, it does not much concern the artist himself." Though criticism is of little use to the author directly, it can be of immense service to him indirectly, if it be exposition rather than comment; not a bald and barren attempt at classification, but a sympathetic interpretation. At bottom, sympathy is the prime requisite of the critic; and with sympathy come appreciation, penetration, revelation — such, for example, as the American novelist has shown in his criticisms of the Russian.

There is one kind of review of no benefit either to the author or to the public. This is the careless, perfunctory book-notice, penned hastily by a tired

writer, who does not take the trouble to formulate his opinion, and perhaps not even to form one. Toward the end of 1889 there appeared in a British weekly the following notice of a volume of American short stories:

> A littery gent in one of Mr. [——]'s short stories says: "A good idea for a short story is a shy bird, and doesn't come for the calling." Alas! alas! it is true. The French can call a great deal better than we can; but the Americans, it would seem, cannot. The best of Mr. [——]'s stories is the first, about a tree which grew out of the bosom of a buried suicide, and behaved accordingly to his descendants; but, so far from being a short story, it is a long one, extending over some hundreds of years, and it suffers from the compression which Mr. [——] puts upon it. It deserves to have a volume to itself.

Refraining from all remark upon the style in which this paragraph is written or upon the taste of the writer, I desire to call attention to the fact that it is not what it purports to be. It is not a criticism within the accepted meaning of the word. It indicates no intellectual effort on the part of its writer to understand the author of the book. An author would need to be superlatively sensitive who could take offense at this paragraph, and an author who could find pleasure in it would have to be unspeakably vain. To me this notice seems the absolute negation of criticism — mere words with no suggestion of a thought behind them. The

man who dashed this off robbed the author of a criticism to which he was entitled if the book was worth reviewing at all; and in thus shirking his bounden duty he also cheated the proprietor of the paper who paid him. Empty paragraphing of this offensive character is commoner now than it was a few years ago, commoner in Great Britain than in the United States, and commoner in anonymous articles than in those warranted by the signature of the writer. Probably the man who was guilty of this innocuous notice would have been ashamed to put his name to it.

If a book is so empty that there is nothing to say about it, then there is no need to say anything. It is related that when a dramatist, who was reading a play before the Committee of the Comédie Française, rebuked M. Got for slumbering peacefully during this ceremony, the eminent comedian answered promptly, "Sleep, monsieur, is also an opinion." If a book puts the critic to sleep, or so benumbs his faculties that he finds himself speechless, he has no call to proceed further in the matter. Perhaps the author may take heart of grace when he remembers that of all Shakspere's characters, it was the one with the ass's head who had an exposition of sleep come upon him, as it was the one with the blackest heart who said he was nothing if not critical.

If I were to attempt to draw up Twelve Good Rules for Reviewers, I should begin with:

I. Form an honest opinion.

II. Express it honestly.

III. Don't review a book which you cannot take seriously.

IV. Don't review a book with which you are out of sympathy. That is to say, put yourself in the author's place, and try to see his work from his point of view, which is sure to be a coign of vantage.

V. Stick to the text. Review the book before you, and not the book some other author might have written; *obiter dicta* are as valueless from the critic as from the judge. Don't go off on a tangent. And also don't go round in a circle. Say what you have to say, and stop. Don't go on writing about and about the subject, and merely weaving garlands of flowers of rhetoric.

VI. Beware of the Sham Sample, as Charles Reade called it. Make sure that the specimen bricks you select for quotation do not give a false impression of the *façade*, and not only of the elevation merely, but of the perspective also, and of the ground-plan.

VII. In reviewing a biography or a history, criticise the book before you, and don't write a parallel

essay for which the volume you have in hand serves only as a peg.

VIII. In reviewing a work of fiction, don't give away the plot. In the eyes of the novelist, this is the unpardonable sin. And, as it discounts the pleasure of the reader also, it is almost equally unkind to him.

IX. Don't try to prove every successful author a plagiarist. It may be that many a successful author has been a plagiarist, but no author ever succeeded because of his plagiary.

X. Don't break a butterfly on a wheel. If a book is not worth much, it is not worth reviewing.

XI. Don't review a book as an east wind would review an apple-tree — so it was once said Douglas Jerrold was wont to do. Of what profit to any one is mere bitterness and vexation of spirit?

XII. Remember that the critic's duty is to the reader mainly, and that it is to guide him not only to what is good, but to what is best. Three parts of what is contemporary must be temporary only.

Having in the past now and again fallen from grace myself and written criticism, I know that on such occasions these Twelve Good Rules would have been exceedingly helpful to me had I then possessed them; therefore I offer them now hopefully to my fellow-critics. But I find myself in a

state of humility (to which few critics are accustomed), and I doubt how far my good advice will be heeded. I remember that, after reporting the speech in which Poor Richard's maxims were all massed together, Franklin tells us that "thus the old gentleman ended his harangue. The people heard it and approved the doctrine; and immediately practised the contrary, just as if it had been a common sermon."

(1890)

AN EPISTLE

To Master Brander Matthews, writer, on the occasion of his putting forth a book entitled "Pen and Ink."

—

New London, Conn., Sept. 10, 1888.

Dear Brander:

I have known thee long, and found
Thee wise in council, and of judgment sound;
Steadfast in friendship, sound and clear in wit,
And more in virtues than may here be writ.
But most I joy, in these machine-made days,
To see thee constant in a craftsman's ways;
That the plain tool that knew thy 'prentice hand
Gathers no rust upon thy writing-stand;
That no Invention saves the labor due
To any Task that's worth the going through;
That now when butter snubs the stranger churn,
Plain pen and ink still serve a writer's turn.
Though I, more firmly orthodox, still hold,
In dire default of quills, to steel or gold,
And though thy pen be rubber—let it pass—
A breath of blemish on thy soul's clear glass.

There is no "writing fluid" in thy pot,
But honest ink of nutgall brew, God wot!
Thou dost not an electric needle ply
And, like a housewife with an apple-pie,
Prick thy fair page into a stencil-plate—
Then daub with lampblack for a duplicate.
Nor thine the sloven page whereon the shirk
With the rough tool attempts the finished work,
And introduces to the sight of men
The Valet Pencil for the Master Pen.

Not all like thee! in this uneasy age,
When more by trick than toil we earn our wage.
Here by the sea a gentle poet dwells,
And in fair leisure weaves his magic spells;
And yet doth dare with countenance serene
To weave them on a tinkling steel machine,
Where an impertinent and soulless bell
Rings, at each finished line, a jangling knell.
The muse and I, we love him, and I think
She MAY *forgive his slight to pen and ink,*
And let no dull mechanic cam or cog
The lightsome movement of his metres clog;
But oh! I grieve to see his fingers toy
With this base slave in dalliance close and coy,
While in his standish dries the atrid spring
Where hides the shyer muse that loves to sing.

Give me the old-time ink, black, flowing, free,
And give, oh, give! the old goose-quill to me—
The goose-quill, whispering of humility.

It whispers to the bard: "Fly not too high!
You *flap your wings—remember, so could* I.
I *cackled in my lifetime, it is true;*
But yet again remember, so do You.
And there were some things possible to me
That possible to you will never be.
I *stood for hours on one columnar leg,*
And, if my sex were such, could lay an egg.
Oh, well for you, if you could thus beget
Material for your morning omelette;
Or, if things came to such a desperate pass,
You could in calm contentment nibble grass!
Conceited bard! and can you sink to rest
Upon the feather-pillow of your breast?"

Hold, my dear Brander, to your pot of ink:
The muse sits poised upon that fountain's brink.
And that you long may live to hold a pen
I'll breathe a prayer;
The world will say "Amen!"

H. C. Bunner.